

GATEWAY

screenplay

by

Jeff Vintar

based on the novel

by

Frederik Pohl

FADE IN:

INT. DEEP IN THE EARTH -- DAY

BOB BROADHEAD positions a heavy-duty DRILL and BORES INTO THE ROCK. A cloud of thick black DUST quickly envelops him. He releases the trigger. Waits.

The dust clears revealing a JAGGED HOLE cut in the stone and Bob turns quickly. Gestures.

A NERVOUS MAN steps into the artificial light. In contrast to Bob, his face is hidden behind an enormous BREATHING MASK, and through the thick lenses we see two very frightened eyes.

He carries EXPLOSIVE CHARGES.

Bob takes the first charge and slides it into the jagged opening. Flips the switch--

A light on the explosive BLIPS ON, primed, and ready to blow.

They move down the wall and repeat the procedure, setting half-a-dozen explosives into an equal number of newly-drilled holes, flipping the switches.

Bob slips the last charge into the stone and pauses. Looks at his associate. The bulky mask amplifies the man's erratic BREATHING. Bob flips the final switch. Across the entire length of the rock face, the charge lights start to BLINK and

They turn and run like hell--

Bob hurries across the loose NARROW BOARDS serving as floor in the tunnel. The nervous man slips off the planks into the muck. Bob hoists him out and they duck into a nearby RECESS.

The blinking lights STOP and:

THE EXPLOSION SHAKES THE WALLS around them. DUST AND DEBRIS BLASTS down the length of the tunnel and blocks out the view.

Slowly the dust begins to clear. Bob looks around. Listens.

The nervous man is too scared to move. His eyes shift left and right. Finally he pulls off his mask, a relieved smile spreading over his face. He turns to Bob. Starts to speak--

Bob gestures at him. Quiet!

From somewhere deep in the rock, there comes an eerie RUMBLE.

Bob grabs him, and they run. DIRT AND SHALE POURS from the ceiling in thick columns and

Suddenly the ROOF GIVES WAY and they are both BURIED ALIVE. Only Bob's hand reaches out of the dirt, searching for a grip, grasping at the shale--

Inch-by-inch Bob slowly pulls himself out, his head first, then his shoulders, torso. But he isn't alone. Using all of his strength and willpower, Bob pulls the other man free too.

They lie on the floor of the tunnel, exhausted, covered in dirt, GASPING for breath and

The walls GROAN even louder--

Bob and his associate crawl across the floor of the tunnel, but slowly. Much too slowly.

MORE COLUMNS OF DIRT begin to form. The men drag themselves onto a small metal PLATFORM as the remainder of the TUNNEL COLLAPSES in a storm of rock.

Bob reaches up, searching for a RED BUTTON. He finds it and

INT. ELEVATOR -- DAY

BOB holds on as the platform SHOOTS UPWARD through a narrow shaft of rock. He struggles to stand. This is an open lift and the walls of the shaft RACE PAST AT HIGH SPEED. Stick out your arm and you lose it.

Slowly the NERVOUS MAN stirs. He tries to get up too, but his legs give out. He slips:

His face stops less than an inch from the shaft wall speeding past. Bob caught him. The man stares down at his own nose. We see the TIP IS SCRAPED and

The elevator suddenly STOPS--

EXT. THE MINE -- DAY

BOB and the NERVOUS MAN are thrown out onto the surface, and immediately react to the sun.

They are in the middle of a working mine. BIG LOADERS RUMBLE PAST. The surrounding landscape is a dead, strip-mined hell. Bob sits up. Dirt and rocks slide off him. His face looks like it may never wash clean. He tries to say something but:

Suddenly a big WHISTLE BLOWS.

INT. MAIN OFFICE -- DAY

BOB stands in a long ambling line with other FILTHY MINERS. He reaches the TIME CLOCK, inserts his CARD, and PUNCHES out.

INT. SEEDY BAR -- NIGHT

A grungy television displays today's WINNING LOTTERY NUMBERS.

The BARTENDER begins to channel surf. We catch a glimpse of a bizarre alien SPACESHIP. A COMMERCIAL asks, "Looking for adventure?" A handsome NEWS ANCHOR says, "Scientists still cannot explain--" A SMILING MAN surrounded by MONEY adds, "I went to outer space and all I brought back was a FORTUNE." An EXCITABLE CROWD chants a word we hear for the first time--

"HEECHEE!"

BOB sits on his usual stool and stares into the broken mirror behind the bar, his EMPTY BEER BOTTLES speedily accumulating.

TWO MINERS step up to the bar next to Bob and catch the BREWS sliding their way. They raise the bottles...but then notice:

MINER #1

You all right, Bob?

MINER #2

Of course he's all right. That is Bob Broadhead you're talkin' about!

MINER #1

Then why does he look like that?

MINER #2

Like what?

MINER #1

All contemplative like...

In unison they look in the mirror and study Bob's expression.

MINER #2

That is not a contemplating face.

MINER #1

The hell it isn't.

MINER #2
When have you ever contemplated anything?

MINER #1
Plenty o' times.

MINER #2
Uh-huh.

MINER #1
Ten bucks says Bob is in an advanced state of contemplation right now.

MINER #2
You're on.

They wait for him to speak... and wait. Bob clutches a beer, obviously intoxicated, studying his reflection. Now he looks ready to say something. His friends lean close, and finally:

BOB
Started working the food mines at half-pay, age twelve...

The first miner smiles wide. The loser reaches deep inside his pocket, and hands over his oily crumpled ten dollar BILL.

BOB (CONT'D)
By the time I was sixteen, had my rating: charge driver.

MINER #1
Your folks would be real proud of you, Bob. That's hard work, and good pay--

BOB
Yeah. Good pay... but what do you do with it?

MINER #2
What do you mean, Bob?

BOB
It's not enough to get you out.

MINER #1
Out of what?

Their FOREMAN steps up to the bar, the soot on his face by now a permanent feature. He doesn't seem to like Bob much. Clearly, the feeling's mutual:

FOREMAN
Griping, Broadhead?

BOB
Drinkin'.

FOREMAN
Close call today--

BOB
Think so?

FOREMAN
Your charges were too close.

BOB
My charges were fine. We're
drillin' too deep, too fast.

FOREMAN
Oh is that right? Maybe you
oughta file a complaint with
management.

Bob finds that funny, and LAUGHS in his beer. The foreman
isn't amused. He moves close:

FOREMAN
I can tell your future, Bob.
One day, maybe real soon,
your luck will run out, and
you'll find yourself under a
couple tons o' loose shale.
Oh...we'll get you out. We
don't leave our people. Of
course, it may take a while.

The two miners closest to Bob are beginning to look worried,
expecting the worst. Everybody within earshot is listening--

FOREMAN (CONT'D)
I reckon you know all about
waitin'. How long was your
daddy trapped in that cave-in?
Must be hard on a kid. Is
it true what they say, after
a man's been buried more than
three days, he's just not
good for anything anymore--

Bob turns on the foreman and lands an old-fashioned PUNCH
that drops him to the floor.

You could hear a pin drop. Bob stares down at his limp body.

BOB
Drinks on me.

Everybody CHEERS. MALE AND FEMALE MINERS rush the bar for their free drinks, while Bob makes his way toward the street.

His two friends share a worried look and follow close behind:

MINER #1
You can't just punch out
the boss, Bob.

BOB
Too late...

MINER #2
All of this contemplation
is messin' with the inner-
workings of your brain!

Bob stops at the screen door. He stares out at the night and

BOB
I have never seen things
more clearly, boys. For
the first time in my life,
I can decide for myself.

MINER #1
Decide what, Bob?

Bob turns around and looks at them, with such an expression, they have to know this is the last time they'll ever see him.

BOB
Who I want to be tomorrow.

And Bob pushes out the door.

EXT. RURAL ROAD -- NIGHT

BOB walks away from the place, unsteady at first, but quickly picking up the pace. SOUNDS OF THE BAR fade. Bob reaches the road and keeps on going.

EXT. RECRUITMENT OFFICE -- NIGHT

A tired BOB leaves the long stretch of pavement for a small building plastered with POSTERS that read: "Join the Star Rush," "Find the Lost Alien Race" and "Plunder the Universe!"

Nevertheless Bob stares at one sign in particular: "CLOSED."

That settles it. His legs give out from under him, and Bob falls face down in the dirt...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RECRUITMENT OFFICE -- LATER

The sun is rising in the sky. BOB hasn't moved an inch, still lying on the ground, when a VEHICLE pulls up to the building and parks. We hear the sound of a CAR DOOR opening.

A PAIR OF LEGS walks across the dirt and gravel right past Bob, not even hesitating. We hear the sound of KEYS, the FRONT DOOR swinging open, and a second later it BANGING SHUT.

Moments pass. Bob lies there.

The DOOR opens again. The same FOOTSTEPS cross gravel. Now THE LEGS return, and stand by Bob. We never do see his face:

RECRUITMENT GUY

(bored, by rote)

Earth not doin' right by you?
 Hope the stars will treat you
 better? If you answer yes to
 the above, then fame, fortune,
 and adventure can be yours--
 Go and search the cosmos for
 fantastic discoveries that defy
 imagination, priceless objects
 older than humanity, and maybe
 even find an alien or two....

Bob doesn't move an inch. Is he even awake? We don't know--

RECRUITMENT GUY

Passage off planet ain't cheap.

Bob moves his arm and only his arm, searching around in his pocket, and finally coming up with one simple LOTTERY TICKET.

The ticket is FLASHING repeatedly: "WINNER! WINNER! WINNER!"

The man accepts the ticket. A second later, he reaches back down for Bob's thumb, pressing the digit against a small HANDHELD DEVICE. It BEEPS and

RECRUITMENT GUY

The human race thanks you.

The legs leave. We hear the sound of FOOTSTEPS on gravel. The door re-opens and BANGS SHUT. Bob just lies in the dirt.

BOB
 (muffled)
You're welcome.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRANSPORT SHIP -- SPACE

The next generation of EARTH SHUTTLE crosses a sea of stars--

CUT TO:

INT. TRANSPORT SHIP -- SPACE

BOB and the other NEW ARRIVALS lie strapped side-by-side in zero-gravity WEBBING. The passenger cabin is crammed full, everyone packed in tight; and unfortunately for Bob, he is stuck next to a woman named SHERI, who never stops talking...

SHERI

Are you scared? Not me, I mean, I know why I should be scared: We're going to climb into spaceships built by aliens before we were born -- before anyone was born -- strap ourselves in, and hit "go." We'll travel faster than light, we don't know how... We don't know how long we'll be gone, even if we knew where we were going, which we don't. So we could travel our whole lives and die before we get there, or run into something that will kill us in two seconds-- Right? Right.

(short pause)

Are you scared?

Bob watches a uniformed CREW MEMBER float past directly above them, moving smoothly through the cabin. He grins knowingly:

CREW MEMBER

Docking in 5 minutes. *Welcome to Gateway!*

EXT. ASTEROID -- SPACE

The shuttle approaches a large ASTEROID. It looks lumpy, charred, and pockmarked with craters. An ancient space rock. But the craters on this asteroid berth STARSHIPS.

We see only the nose of the ships as the great rock rotates, giving us a long look at what's become our "gateway" to the stars...

CUT TO:

INT. LARGE DOCK -- DAY

BOB and the other NEW ARRIVALS walk a narrow lane formed by two ROWS OF SHIPS, charred and battered like ancient relics, but somehow still beautiful. The exotic lines of the alien design defy normal Earthly expectations of space or rocketry.

Bob can't take his eyes off the ships. Up ahead, SECURITY PERSONNEL are tossing INFORMATION PACKETS the size of several phone books into the waiting arms of the awestruck newcomers.

Assistant Director EMMA FOTHER steps out onto a small BALCONY and addresses the group. Unlike most of the others on this asteroid, Emma is always well-groomed and impeccably dressed:

EMMA

"Welcome aboard."

(short pause)

That was a joke, but you won't understand it for some time... The information packet you are being given contains your room assignment; a daily per-capita tax assessment for the air you are already breathing; and a copy of your contract granting the Gateway Corporation sole authority in the exploitation, sale, and lease of any and all discoveries you make during your missions into outer space.

Bob moves forward, catches the packet tossed his way, and immediately looks around for something. He seems to find it.

EMMA (CONT'D)

It is vital that you do not lose your information packet--

Emma sees Bob throw his information packet INTO A GARBAGE CAN. She stops talking. Bob senses he was observed, looks up, and locks eyes with Emma. Clearly she hates him already.

Bob looks back at the starships one last time, then walks on.

INT. MAZE OF TUNNELS -- DAY

BOB steps into a maze of tunnels constructed from a strange, luminescent alien metal that emits its own light. These passages wind crazily through the rock and are always CROWDED with prospectors, security guards, and maintenance personnel.

He reads the CARD with his room number, scans a colorful MAP on the wall, and starts off--

But Bob doesn't go unnoticed. DANE METCHNIKOV is small and rodent-like. He locks onto Bob and scurries up beside him, even creepier when he smiles:

DANE
Greetings, friend!

Bob glances down at him. Says nothing at all. Keeps moving.

DANE (CONT'D)
Name's Dane Metchnikov, guide
and financial advisor, 1-stop
shop for off-Earth contraband,
trustworthy confidant and all-
around orientation specialist.
(short pause)
If you'll follow me this way,
I'll be happy to--

Bob heads in the other direction and Dane looks disappointed.

DANE
--or that way, sure.

Bob and Dane pass a SCREEN playing images of Gateway. A soothing female voice offers:

VOICE OF GATEWAY
*Gateway is an artifact created
by the ancient Heechee race. It
was formed around an asteroid or
the core of an atypical comet--*

The NEXT SCREEN they pass by is giving the same presentation.

VOICE OF GATEWAY
*The time of its creation is not
known, but almost surely precedes
the rise of human civilization!*

Bob keeps moving down the tunnel. Dane struggles to keep up.

DANE

I've helped a lot of new fish
...no offense...transition to
life on a hunk o' space rock.

BOB

Don't need your help. I
spent most of my days in
tunnels just like--

An UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECT enters the tunnel. It looks like a metal ball with little folded bug arms. The thing speeds through the corridor. Everybody ducks out of the way.

It whizzes between Bob and Dane, and darts around the corner.

BOB (CONT'D)

The hell was that?

DANE

Now this is exactly what I am
talkin' about. For a small
retainer, a token fee, I can be
available to answer questions
such as, "the hell was that?"

Bob grabs Dane by the shirt and pulls him close. Scares him.

BOB

How about you answer for free?

DANE

Sure, you want to sample the
product before buying-- I
understand completely. That
is just good business sense!

BOB

(again, stronger)
The hell was that?

DANE

I don't know--

Bob starts down the tunnel. Dane follows, trying to explain:

DANE (CONT'D)

Nobody knows!

BOB

What do you mean *nobody* knows?

DANE

The aliens left it. It just flies around, and as far as anybody can tell, doesn't do anything-- You can't catch it, and it never stops. My own personal theory is, it's an air freshener.

BOB

The air stinks--

Bob steps inside a bizarre ELEVATOR. Dane squeezes in, fast.

DANE

How do you know, maybe that's the smell o' Heechee flowers?

INT. WEIRD ELEVATOR -- DAY

BOB and DANE huddle inside a claustrophobic elevator never meant to carry occupants the size and shape of human beings--

Dane stares up at Bob, expectantly. If he had a tail, he'd be wagging it. Finally Bob gives in. He reaches into his pocket and takes out a TWENTY.

Dane grabs the bill fast, crumples it, pulls it, and holds it up to the light while he says:

DANE

Everyone who comes to Gateway gets ten days' worth of food, lodging, and air -- courtesy of the Gateway Corporation -- plus an invitation to sign up for the next spaceship out. You don't have to sign up for the next prospecting trip, or any trip at all. If you lose your nerve, you can stay here until your money runs out...

The elevator doors slide OPEN.

Immediately Bob hears SCREAMS. SECURITY GUARDS are dragging a STRUGGLING MAN toward an open AIRLOCK. They throw him in--

One of the guards hits a switch, the thick airlock door slides shut, and a moment later we see the terrified man at the small window, POUNDING on the glass and YELLING for help.

Bob watches the scene intensely, hardened enough by life that death doesn't shock him, but even this takes getting used to:

BOB

(dryly)

Looks like his money ran out.

The outer hatch BLOWS OPEN and the man is suddenly PULLED FROM THE WINDOW -- as if by an invisible hand -- just a blur.

Through the porthole we briefly glimpse the man's unprotected body HURLING TOWARD THE STARS.

Dane squeezes closer making room for OTHERS trying to get on.

DANE

You go bust, you take the next shuttle home. Try to run...you get the airlock.

The elevator slides SHUT. It really is very cramped in here.

Dane stands next to a HEAVY-SET NURSE transporting a high-tech BIOLOGICAL CONTAINER. About the size of a large bucket.

A SCREEN in the elevator displays the Gateway CORPORATE LOGO:

VOICE OF GATEWAY

*Gateway is proud to announce
the return of mission 24-331
...another successful voyage
into the unknown!*

DANE

That means the ship returned. It doesn't say anything about the condition of the crew.

BOB

What happened to the crew?

NURSE

(gruffly)

You're lookin' at 'em.

The elevator OPENS and the nurse EXITS carrying her medical bucket. Bob watches her go. Slowly the doors begin to shut.

DANE

"Successful" is defined kind of loosely around here--

CUT TO:

INT. MAZE OF TUNNELS -- DAY

The elevator OPENS on a different level. BOB starts down the tunnel and scans the room numbers, with DANE right alongside.

DANE

They probably dropped out of warp too close to a sun, or a supernova. Best not to think about it. Besides, I've been out three times, and look at me: sound of mind and body!

BOB

Uh-huh.

They pass several more SCREENS with ACTORS SIGNING DOCUMENTS:

VOICE OF GATEWAY

*Upon your arrival on Gateway,
remember to read and sign
your Memorandum of Agreement--*

Now the same actors in SPACESUITS are finding fake-looking ARTIFACTS on a staged planet.

VOICE OF GATEWAY

*--releasing all rights in and
to any discoveries, artifacts,
and objects of value you find
during exploration--*

The actors hand them over to COMPANY OFFICIALS, shake hands, and receive OVERSIZED CHECKS.

VOICE OF GATEWAY

--to the Gateway Authority!

They find a door. Bob stops.

DANE

Guys like you and me? We feed off danger. I'm just biding my time waitin' for the right mission to come along, eyes on the big score, you know? I'll leave here a wealthy man.

BOB

If you say so.

There is a DEAFENING BLAST, and the tunnel lurches, as if the

asteroid is breaking apart....

DANE

That was--

BOB

(realizing)

--a ship taking off.

DANE

Yeah, you'll feel that a lot.

Bob moves toward his room, and the door opens automatically.

DANE

You reckon maybe I should
wait outside your door a while
in case you need me--

Bob shoves another BILL into Dane's hand, and walks into the room. The door slides shut. A happy Dane examines his cash.

DANE (CONT'D)

*Can't stay, very busy, gotta
run!*

INT. BOB'S QUARTERS -- DAY

BOB stands inside of his room. Literally, standing in place is all he can do. Bob's room is the SIZE OF A SMALL CLOSET--

There is a sleeping bag hanging on the wall, assuming he can fall asleep vertically. A miniscule sink and a funny toilet that retracts. Hooks and slots for his things. He has about six inches of wiggle room between his shoulders and the wall.

A tiny private SCREEN BLIPS ON with a close-up of an EYEBALL.

VOICE OF GATEWAY

*Gateway not what you expected?
Experiencing feelings of profound
regret? Let the Sigfrid-1000
Automated Psycho-analyst help!*

For the first time we see Bob smile, and LAUGH. Something tells us he has never looked this happy in his entire life...

BOB

No thanks, darlin'. I'm good.
I'm real good.

INT. "THE BLUE HELL" -- NIGHT

Ragged-looking PROSPECTORS guzzle down cheap BOOZE at the long bar. Space-adapted gaming tables showcase POKER, a slow-moving ROULETTE with a big dense ball, and CRAPS with dice that take forever to stop. A dozen DIFFERENT LANGUAGES can be heard mixed together--English, Russian, Chinese, Spanish--and everyone talks animatedly, as if trying to be understood.

BOB walks through the swinging doors, as if stepping into the wild west. He looks around.

MALE VOICE

And now, my dear friends and
fools, let us speak of bigger
rewards -- and of a bonus the
company never expects to pay.

Bob wants to hear this and squeezes through the crowd to see:

PROFESSOR HEGRAMET sits at a table holding a BEER, surrounded by his REGULAR AUDIENCE of half-drunk/half-alert prospectors.

PROFESSOR

Five hundred million dollars
for that lucky man or woman
who finds a living Heechee--

Everyone gathered around BLURTS a positive guttural response.

PROFESSOR

You! Answer me this. What
did the Heechee look like?

MALE PROSPECTOR

Beats me.

PROFESSOR

Of course it does -- because
we've never found anything
resembling a photograph or a
drawing. Now tell me: Did
they have some system for
storing knowledge? Did they
have books? Did they write?

FEMALE PROSPECTOR

Yeah?

PROFESSOR

Surely, they must have. What
that system was, we simply
don't know. Now tell me, what
is the biggest mystery of all?

Everybody stands there, perplexed, hiding behind their beers. Bob isn't one to speak up, but something about this gets him:

BOB

The Heechee didn't die here--

The Professor finds Bob and looks him over. Seems surprised.

PROFESSOR

And why not?

BOB

Because if they did, we'd find their bones...or whatever they had instead of bones.

PROFESSOR

A worthy observation. Go on.

BOB

If they didn't die, then they left. So I guess the big mystery is, why did the Heechee leave all this for us to find ...and where did they go?

PROFESSOR

Brilliant. That is the very question which compelled me to leave the confines of the classroom and venture out to the wilds of Gateway itself!

The Professor takes a drink. Everyone stands around waiting for him to continue, but he never does, and finally Bob asks:

BOB

So where are they?

PROFESSOR

My dear fellow, it beats the piss out of me.

He sets his head face down on the table. Class dismissed... Everyone disperses. Bob looks like he should have known better. He makes his way to the bar and takes an open stool.

A group of DRUNKEN PROSPECTORS lift up their bottles in song:

DRUNKS

We get squashed, burned, and shredded to bits -- we don't care which -- little lost Heechee start making us rich!

The BARTENDER slides a BEER to Bob. He nods thanks and raises the bottle to his lips when he is shoved from behind--

Bob turns and sees an ENORMOUS MAN standing behind him. The giant has a problem with Bob.

BARTENDER

You're sittin' in his seat.

Bob thinks about it. Doesn't want any trouble. He starts to leave -- and gets shoved again. The enormous man glares down at Bob, but doesn't say anything. Hell, maybe he can't talk.

BARTENDER

He wants to make an example of you to warn others.

The giant wraps his thick fingers around Bob's beer, takes it from him, and tosses the bottle over his shoulder. Bob watches his beer sail away...

The bottle rises into the air, and just when you think it's going to fall back down, IT KEEPS RISING. The beer tumbles end-over-end through the cave like it's never coming back and

BOB

(surprised)

My beer--

The bartender SPITS into a dirty glass and casually explains.

BARTENDER

Right up there is the center of the asteroid. The center doesn't spin.

The giant rolls up his sleeves, getting ready to pummel Bob--

BOB

No spin, no gravity, gotcha.

The enormous man lunges and misses. Bob evades the blow and leaps onto a table, from the table onto the giant's back, LAUNCHING HIMSELF IN THE AIR.

Bob jumps high above the tavern floor...and never comes down.

Everyone in the bar looks up, sees him, and CHEERS WILDLY as BOB RISES HIGHER AND HIGHER--

He floats through the cavern over the saloon, pleased with himself and his great escape.

The enormous man watches Bob go, disappointed. He sits down.

Gradually everybody returns to their drinks or to the games.
For Bob, realization sets in--

BOB

Uh-oh.

Bob drifts in the zero-gravity, STARTING TO SPIN a little,
unable to stop his slow tumble and with nothing to grab onto.

FEMALE VOICE

Looks like I got me a floater.

Bob looks around, the best he can. Where did that come from?

BOB

Who said that?

FEMALE VOICE

I did.

Out of the deep dark shadows of the cavern, a figure emerges:

KLARA MOYNLIN is a strong-faced woman, her hair pulled back
tight, sailing through the air.

KLARA

Relax your body.

BOB

What--

KLARA SLAMS INTO BOB and knocks the wind out of him. They
fly through the core together, one of her arms wrapped around
him, the other extended out in front of her like a lifeguard.

Bob recovers. Holds her tight.

KLARA

Have you ever been with a
woman?

BOB

Uh-huh--

KLARA

Then there's no reason to
hold on so tight.

BOB

Sorry.

(short pause)

I don't want you to think
this is a rescue.

KLARA

Did you have a plan
for getting down when you
jumped up here?

BOB

Not exactly.

KLARA

Then it's a rescue.

Bob turns his head, surprised but pleased to see his BEER FLOATING BY, sailing off in the other direction. He reaches out and snatches the bottle.

KLARA

You should begin to feel a
pull toward the ground--

Suddenly Bob and Klara LAND HARD ON THE FLOOR of the tavern. Bob takes the brunt of the impact, with Klara lying on top of him. They are surrounded by FEET scurrying out of their way.

Bob raises the bottle in his hand, and offers Klara the beer:

BOB

(still in pain)
How about a drink?

Klara looks at the beer, like where the hell did he get that? Then she smiles a little, grabs the bottle, and twists off the cap. Still sitting astride Bob, she takes a long drink--

Bob watches her, clearly impressed. She hands the beer back.

KLARA

See you around.

BOB

Hold on. What's your name?

KLARA

Klara.

Bob wants to tell Klara his name, but he can't get a word in:

KLARA (CONT'D)

Your name is Tom, or Johnny,
or Bill. You grew up in the
middle of nowhere and worked
in a factory. Or was it a
farm, or a mine? It doesn't

(CONT'D)

KLARA (CONT'D)

matter-- From the time you were a little boy you dreamed about running away from that godforsaken town. Then one day somebody died and left you better off, or you robbed a bank. Suddenly you had more money than you could drink away with the guys or blow on the same old girls. And so you bought a one-way ticket to Gateway... the only place in the universe guaranteed worse than the one you left--
 (short pause)
 How am I doing?

Bob looks at Klara. Every word just makes him like her more.

BOB

(finding one fault)
 My name is Bob.

KLARA

I don't want to know you, Bob.

BOB

Why not?

KLARA

People around here tend not to live long--

She starts to get off, but Bob takes her by the arms. There is something about him, a confidence, a spirit, that attracts Klara despite her best effort:

BOB

Don't I get a last wish?

CUT TO:

INT. MACKLEN MEMORIAL -- NIGHT

BOB and KLARA stumble into a cave drinking BEERS, LAUGHING and holding each other, already well into their intoxication.

The floor is COVERED IN PLEXIGLASS to protect the message roughly scratched in the rock: "SYLVESTER MACKLEN WAS HERE."

Their movements trigger a series of motion-activated SCREENS.

VOICE OF GATEWAY

*Gateway was discovered by
Sylvester Macklen, a tunnel
rat on Venus, who found an
operable Heechee spacecraft
in a dig, and got inside--*

A hokey dramatization labeled "RE-ENACTMENT" shows Sylvester Macklen's final moments. A square-jawed actor LIGHTS A MATCH and heroically tosses the flame at his overturned FUEL TANKS.

VOICE OF GATEWAY

*Unable to return to Earth
--and without food or water--
Macklen signaled the exact
location of Gateway by
cleverly blowing himself up!*

Bob gets interested in the show, and we hear the EXPLOSION, but Klara pulls him toward a display ROPED OFF from the rest.

On the other side of the rope is an old, dusty HEECHEE SHIP.

VOICE OF GATEWAY

*The Heechee vessel you see
here is the actual ship Macklen
used to travel to Gateway!*

Klara unhooks the rope, but not before Bob trips and falls--

KLARA

Shhhhh!

They sneak to the ship, trying to be quiet. Klara struggles with the HATCH until it gives... and they tumble in LAUGHING.

INT. HEECHEE SHIP -- NIGHT

BOB descends a strange-looking ladder into the main cabin and immediately sets his eyes on the weird HEECHEE CONTROL PANEL.

A single V-SHAPED SEAT sits before an array of WHEELS and SPOKES, LIGHTS and SWITCHES, a SPIRAL COIL and a diamond-shaped BLACK BOX. The control panel looks both ancient AND cutting-edge futuristic -- a uniquely disturbing combination.

Seeing that control panel goes a long way in sobering Bob up.

KLARA (O.S.)

Having fun yet?

Bob turns as an upside-down KLARA pokes her head through the ceiling. She disappears a second then drops down feet first.

Klara sips from her beer BOTTLE as she talks, clearly tipsy, but still commanding attention:

KLARA

You see that vertical line of wheels with the little spokes sticking out of them? That's the only thing on the control panel you can touch. Toilet is over there. You'll have a lot of fun with that, but it works... You can sling your hammock and sleep here. That funny black box is the brain of the whole ship, but nobody knows what's inside-- Don't ever get curious or bored and try to open it.

BOB

Why not?

KLARA

Because every time somebody does, it explodes.

Bob sits in the weird seat and looks uncomfortable, like it just doesn't fit his behind--

BOB

What kind of asses did these Heechee have?

KLARA

That's another mystery.

Klara takes Bob's hand and places it on one of those wheels. But then she doesn't remove her hand from his. Bob looks pleased, but surprised. Klara leans over his shoulder close:

KLARA

Don't worry, no one's ever been able to get this ship off the ground--now try to turn the wheel.

Slowly they turn the strange alien wheel together. The panel dimly LIGHTS UP. It HUMS, gently. Bob and Klara both smile, enjoying the close proximity.

BOB

What's next?

KLARA

The wild blue yonder.

BOB

And there's no way to tell
where you're going?

KLARA

Probably, if you're a Hee-
chee pilot a million years
ago with training. All us
human beings have to wait
until the bus stops...then
look out the window.

BOB

This is a really great date.

Klara smiles and sits on his lap. Bob pulls her close, and they kiss, in no real hurry to separate their lips. When they do, Klara grows serious.

KLARA

You just need to be brave
for a second. One second
while they shut the hatch.

BOB

How many times have you--

Klara dangles the half-dozen clinking BRACELETS on her wrist.

KLARA

One for each trip. Never
scored big, but I did
alright. Tomorrow I cash
in and sail back to Earth.

BOB

Why?

KLARA

Because, as hard as I try,
I just can't find that one
second of courage anymore.

BOB

Before I came here, all I
did was survive. I just...
lived. I need more than
that, Klara... don't you?

Klara looks like she just doesn't know the answer any longer.

Suddenly the asteroid is violently ROCKED by a large impact. They hold one another to keep from falling, and ALARMS sound:

BOB
That was no take-off--

KLARA
It was a landing!

Klara gets up and runs for the ladder. Quickly, Bob follows.

INT. DOCKING BAY -- NIGHT

WATER IS SPRAYING from the walls and ceiling hitting something very hot. BOB and KLARA make their way through the STEAM. Now the eerie shape of a CRASHED SHIP begins to form.

Bob and Klara are soaked from the jets. They wipe their eyes and try to see. Find a HATCH.

Bob moves to touch it but can't. The metal is still too hot.

He looks around. Bob runs to a box and BREAKS THE GLASS. Pulls out a strange METAL ROD.

Bob and Klara slip the rod into a SOCKET on the surface of the vessel and use all of their combined strength to turn it. The hatch OPENS. They go in--

INT. CRASHED SHIP -- NIGHT

BOB and KLARA climb inside. The air is THICK WITH SMOKE, and the interior demolished. They can't see much, moving deeper:

KLARA
Hello! Can you hear me--
Is anybody alive?

INSANE VOICE
Go away!

Bob and Klara turn to the sound. A CRAZY MAN charges out of the smoke, clothes filthy and torn, face hidden behind a wild beard. He is aiming a BLASTER. Bob moves in front of Klara.

The man's free hand is clenched, like he's holding something. Something he doesn't want anybody else in the galaxy to see--

CRAZY MAN

You can't have it. I found
it, not you. It's mine!

KLARA

We want to help you. Where's
the rest of the crew?

CRAZY MAN

I don't know-- Still on the
planet? They should be here
already... late, very late--

Klara steps into the open. The man trains his weapon on her.

KLARA

You don't need the blaster.
You're home now.

CRAZY MAN

Stay away from me!

He looks around, suddenly worried. Bob is gone. LOST IN THE
SMOKE. The crazy man senses movement. Sees Bob behind him--

Bob knocks the gun from his hand, and gets a grip on the man.

CRAZY MAN

*I found them. The aliens--
I'll cut you in, fella, fifty-
fifty. They gave me a map!*

Bob looks down as the man raises his clenched fist and slowly
opens his fingers to reveal...nothing at all. An empty palm.

The crazy man looks down at his hand, as if it holds a great
treasure, LAUGHING insanely.

Bob just lets him go. The crazy man backs away from them and

He is abruptly STRUCK by a tazer weapon. His body stiffens
and shakes, for one horrible second, then drops to the floor.

AN ARMED SECURITY TEAM wearing biological CONTAINMENT SUITS
takes control of the scene, laying gloved hands on Bob and
Klara, and pulling them out.

INT. THE CORRIDOR -- NIGHT

BOB and KLARA rest against the rocky wall watching EMERGENCY
CREWS run past. Klara leans toward Bob. He pulls her close.

They stay like that a while.

BOB

Let's ship out. Tonight.

Klara takes a second, like she couldn't have heard Bob right. Now she pulls away from him.

BOB

You just need to be brave
for a second. One second
while they shut the hatch.

And Bob holds out his hand--

BOB (CONT'D)

Hell, I can hold your hand
that long.

Klara takes a step back, and another, and another. Finally she turns and runs away down the tunnel. Bob watches her go.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWARD A DOOR -- DAY

An ODD LITTLE MAN wearing a pair of STRAP-ON WINGS glides down the passage, really flying. Shikitei Bakin has NO LEGS.

But he does have a BROOM. Strange reflective SHARDS OF ALIEN METAL litter the floor of the tunnel. Shiky's mechanized wings flutter as he works, sweeping the junk up into a pile--

BOB rounds a corner determined to get somewhere. Shiky stops working and flies along too:

SHIKY

This is your big day, stranger.
You are going to see the launch
captain-- Going to blast off?

Bob looks Shiky over but never stops moving toward the LARGE DOOR at the end of the hall.

SHIKY (CONT'D)

Ah...you have noticed my wings.
Ran into a radiation storm on
my last trip. Emergency hatch
slammed shut while I was climb-
ing back inside the ship. If
you see a pair of legs floating
near the Orion Nebula, please
tell them *Shiky* says hello....

BOB
I'll do that.

SHIKY
They say, Shiky, just go home.
On Earth I'd be disabled...but
up here, in the low gravity, I
am a beautiful butterfly, yes?

Bob can't help but like him.

SHIKY (CONT'D)
If you need an extra hand, it
is true I would not be of much
use in a lander. But in orbit,
I am as good as anyone, maybe
better. If you need an extra
crewman, you will think of me?

Bob stops at the end of the tunnel. He looks up at Shiky and
nods a little, ready to go in. Bob pushes through the door--

INT. LAUNCH FLOOR -- DAY

Take the trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange, add
the blinking lights and neon of Las Vegas, transport it to a
cavern made by ancient aliens...and you get the launch floor.

The grizzled LAUNCH CAPTAIN stands atop his elevated platform
gesturing down at the SCREAMING PROSPECTORS trying to get his
attention. Huge colorful screens run lists of OPEN MISSIONS.

BOB feels the excitement immediately. Walks onto the floor--

The launch captain checks the next CARD in his hand, and
yells like a carnival barker:

LAUNCH CAPTAIN
I've got a THREE here, folks,
a THREE, returned twice with
its crew alive, *more or less*.
Who feels lucky today?

The crowd storms the dais and

SHERI spots Bob in the throng and looks him over, remembering
him from the trip up here, and clearly, liking what she sees.

SHERI
Hi, Bob. Remember me? It's
Sheri...

Bob remembers her all right. She has to talk over the noise.

SHERI

I'm taking a five. It leaves
first thing in the morning...
I've got Willa, Jay and Barry.

Sheri lays a hand on his chest, her interest in him obvious--

SHERI (CONT'D)

It could be a long trip. I
want the last crew member to
be someone I'm...*compatible*
with, if you get my meaning?

Bob catches a glimpse of KLARA across the room. Or does he?

BOB

(distracted)

Thanks, I'll think about it--

More people block his view, and when they pass Klara is GONE, if she was ever there at all.

Bob walks on and Sheri watches him go, disappointed for a second. But then she spots someone else, and checks him out.

SHERI

Hey, big fella...

LAUNCH CAPTAIN (O.S.)

Conner, Fitz, and Yakamora!

He straightens up, reads the next CARD in his hand, and says:

LAUNCH CAPTAIN

Next up is a ONE-- That's
right, a ONE...little or no
chance of coming back alive
...perfect for the crazed
and/or suicidal!

Even this crowd of filthy downtrodden prospectors won't bite.

LAUNCH CAPTAIN

(feigning surprise)

Come on now, people... you
want to live forever?

Bob moves toward the platform, still keeping a look out for Klara, then finally shrugs it off to his eyes playing tricks.

He waits for the next launch.

ANOTHER PROSPECTOR steps up beside Bob and watches the screens. He is skinny, his clothes soiled. On his last leg.

PROSPECTOR

(nervous)

I want that three, you see
it up there?

Bob looks at the man. Then up at the board. Sees the entry.

PROSPECTOR (CONT'D)

It's armored. Gotta be safe
if it's covered with armor,
right? Gotta be... What do
you say, mister?

BOB

I say, any ship covered in
armor ain't goin' anyplace
I want to go.

And Bob steps closer to the dais, leaving the prospector to think about it, his eyes wide, like Jesus, he saved my life--

Out in the center of the floor, the launch captain continues:

LAUNCH CAPTAIN

I've got a FIVE-- Untested
ship with a destination God
knows where... experienced
lander pilot if you're lucky
enough to find a planet, and
four--count 'em, four--spots
still available... You want
to gamble big, and win big?
This is the mission for you.

Bob listens to his speech. Checks the board. Has a feeling.

The prospectors rush forward YELLING for the launch captain's attention, hands in the air, with Bob right in among them and

LAUNCH CAPTAIN

(over the noise)

Cahill, first spot is yours!

Bob pushes and SHOUTS with the best of them, but there are so many, he's lost in the crowd--

LAUNCH CAPTAIN

You! What's your name again?
Frauenglass, congratulations.
Take your pal, Tayeh.

He searches the throng trying to make his final decision, everyone waving and yelling...

LAUNCH CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

I need one more. Come on,
talk to me, who wants it?!

Everybody tries to push closer to the dais. A FIGHT BREAKS OUT. Bob yells with the best of them, but it does no good. The launch captain passes over him, turning his back to Bob--

So it's all the more surprising when he spins around yelling:

LAUNCH CAPTAIN

BROADHEAD!

Bob is pleased, but dumbfounded. The launch captain nods to somebody on the floor. We find KLARA standing and watching--

KLARA

Nice going, Broadhead. I
hear that ship has a good
pilot.

They walk together and leave the desperate, struggling crowd.

BOB

So when do we leave?

KLARA

Countdown starts in T-minus
thirty minutes, and you're
going to do a hell of a lot
more than hold my hand....

CUT TO:

White letters and numbers PRINT quickly across a dark screen.

MISSION 29-140

*Vessel 331, Voyage 08D47, Crew S. Cahill, D. Frauenglass,
M. Tayeh, K. Moynlin, R. Broadhead*

CUT TO:

INT. HEECHEE SHIP -- SPACE

BOB and KLARA make out, like two teenagers in the back seat--

COUNTDOWN

...TEN...NINE...EIGHT...

We pull back. They are strapped inside WEBBING for lift-off.

COUNTDOWN
 ...SEVEN...SIX...FIVE...

Bob and Klara kiss like people who might be dead in a second.

COUNTDOWN
 ...FOUR...THREE...TWO...

They pull apart and hold on.

COUNTDOWN
 ...ONE.

The acceleration suddenly, violently hits Bob and Klara, and they are swallowed by their webbing to the roar of THRUSTERS.

CUT TO:

BOB looks like he's going to lose the contents of his stomach in the next few seconds. KLARA turns to him sympathetically.

KLARA
 Poor Bob. And we're just beginning.

Staring at the big control panel, SAM CAHILL cheerily offers:

SAM
 Fluctuating G forces play havoc with your stomach--

DRED FRAUENGLASS climbs the ladder into the cabin. Sees Bob.

DRED
 Ham, if you don't get out of that bathroom, our situation is going to become critical!

The bathroom opens and MOHAMMED TAYEH steps out. Bob lunges across the cabin SLAMMING the door. Sam, Dred and Ham LAUGH.

CUT TO:

BOB sits on the weird Heechee toilet. It's a very tight fit.

BOB (V.O.)
 This is Bob Broadhead's log. Company wants each of us to keep a record of our voyage so, for whatever it's worth, here's mine. This ship has never been out before....

(CONT'D)

BOB (CONT'D)

That could be bad news for us, since no one has done any maintenance on these things for hundreds of thousands of years. We could end up with a clunker. On the other hand, it means we probably have a full tank of gas, which is good, since nobody knows what the fuel is, or where to put it, or how to tell when it's about to run out. Would it have killed the Heechee to leave a manual lying around?

CUT TO:

BOB emerges from the bathroom. KLARA is the only one in the cabin, checking out their equipment with a CLIPBOARD in hand.

KLARA

Looks like we're going straight toward Galactic North.

BOB

That good?

Klara turns to him, and grins.

KLARA

Who the hell knows?

CUT TO:

At one time or another, EVERYONE in the crew stops to look at that strange COIL on the control panel. They rest in their HAMMOCKS, eat gloopy-looking MEALS, perform mundane household CHORES and try to pretend they aren't watching the coil.

BOB (V.O.)

When the big coil flickers, you've traveled half the distance to wherever you're going. Multiply the number of days you've been out by four, and that's your total travel time. If it's less than the number of days of life-support you have, then at least you know you won't be starving or suffocating to death...

The crew plays POKER. They peek over the cards at that coil.

BOB (V.O.)

Our rations won't support five people for more than 300 days. But they might support four, or three, or two, or one... After the 75-day mark most crews draw straws, or cut the cards. The loser crawls in the freezer and hopes the docs back on Gateway have gotten better at thawing people out. They don't mention this on the recruiting poster.

CUT TO:

BOB wraps his arms around KLARA, holding her close while she sleeps. They are alone in the LANDING MODULE. The HATCH opens fast and SAM calls down--

SAM

Get up here!

CUT TO:

BOB and KLARA climb up into the main cabin. SAM, DRED, and HAM are standing together...real TEARS OF JOY on their faces.

The coil is FLICKERING. All throughout the spiral of glass, golden sparks chase each other.

Klara jumps into Bob's arms and

BOB (V.O.)

The coil flickered...with margin to spare. For now, that's good enough.

DISSOLVE TO:

BOB moves into view, tired and dirty. TIME HAS PASSED. The ship makes strange SOUNDS, and suddenly, Bob begins to FLOAT.

He drifts awkwardly for a second, then finds a foothold and pushes off. KLARA meets him in mid-flight. They can't move quickly enough. SAM, DRED, and HAM join them at a porthole--

BOB (V.O.)

A month later, I feel us drop out of warp. And just like Klara said, we look out the window...

EXT. A NEW PLANET -- SPACE

An enormous GAS-GIANT several times the size of our own planet Jupiter blocks out the stars. The gigantic sphere is made up of diagonal zones and belts of swirling colors, storms large enough to engulf a hundred Earths. An elaborate system of shimmering RINGS encircles the planet, and even closer, there is a strange battered and hostile-looking MOON.

INT. HEECHEE SHIP -- SPACE

BOB stares out through the porthole. He doesn't notice the strangely disappointed expressions on the rest of the crew. One-by-one KLARA, SAM, DRED, and HAM push away from the porthole. Finally Bob realizes he's alone, and turns around:

BOB
What's wrong?

HAM
(losing it)
This whole trip's a wash-out
-- that's what's wrong!

KLARA
We can't land on a gas-giant.

Sam hovers at the man-made instrumentation. Takes a reading.

SAM
I read five more planets....

DRED
They're too far away.

BOB
What about that moon?

SAM
(to Ham)
Check it out.

HAM
It doesn't look good.

SAM
I don't want your *opinion*--
(calming himself)
I want you to check it out.

Ham floats to a station. Works the controls. They all wait.

HAM

Coded electromagnetic radiation...negative.

DRED

Try anomalous time-variant temperatures. Maybe something gets warmer when the sun sets.

HAM

Negative. High albedo surface metal...also negative. What now, boss?

BOB

I'm sorry, who do you mean?

DRED

Oh shut up. Sam?

SAM

Klara is the lander pilot...
(short pause)
...it's her call.

Everyone turns and looks at Klara. She stares at an IMAGE OF THE MOON on the main display.

BOB

I say we take a look at the far side of the moon. Maybe there's a whole Heechee city waiting for us--

HAM

That's brilliant...

SAM

We came a long way. I'm not in a hurry to leave, are you?

Dred and Ham don't look too optimistic, but signal agreement. Now they all wait for Klara--

KLARA

Bob's got a point.

SAM

Far side it is. Anyone have anything inspiring to say?
Bob shares a look with Klara--

BOB
Moon or bust?

INT. HEECHEE LANDER -- SPACE

BOB, KLARA, DRED, and HAM sit crammed together inside the landing module, made even more claustrophobic by the bulky SPACESUITS they wear. A few small portholes reveal the MOON.

KLARA
(into her mike)
Approaching terminus. Talk
to you later, Sam.

The response CRACKLES over the radio, broken up, almost gone:

SAM'S VOICE
Be careful out--

And the communication CUTS OFF.

KLARA
Keep your eyes open, boys...

EXT. ABOVE THE MOON -- SPACE

The garbage can-like Heechee LANDER glides above the far side of this strange moon. The landscape is cratered, as you might expect, but also badly fractured and strangely jumbled.

The crust of the moon CRACKS and a GIANT GEYSER of blue-gray matter sprays out into space--

INT. HEECHEE LANDER -- SPACE

KLARA fights the strange controls as the GEYSER rises up in front of them. BOB, DRED, and HAM react with startled looks.

HAM
This moon is geologically
active.

DRED
Ya think?

And then there's a PING. Just a single ping. Everyone turns and looks at a small man-made, even primitive-looking DEVICE.

KLARA
Confirm that hit--

Bob is closest. He reaches a gloved hand. Presses a button.

BOB
Scanning again for Heechee
signatures.

Seconds tick by. Nothing happens. Then they hear it: PING.

KLARA
Son-of-a-bitch-- Somebody
find me a place to land...

EXT. ABOVE THE MOON -- SPACE

The Heechee LANDER DESCENDS to the surface. The GAS-GIANT and its exotic formation of RINGS form a dramatic backdrop to the DEEP CRATERS and JAGGED MOUNTAINS of this unwelcoming hellhole. The landing struts kick up clouds of moon DUST and

INT. HEECHEE LANDER -- SPACE

BOB, DRED, and HAM are strapping BLASTERS and a few pieces of SURVIVAL EQUIPMENT to their spacesuits. KLARA watches them--

KLARA
I'll keep the engine running.

As soon as Dred and Ham turn around, Klara pulls Bob close. She touches her helmet to his, so she can talk without the com system and Bob can hear her real voice THROUGH THE GLASS.

KLARA (CONT'D)
Nothing fancy, one step at a
time, okay?

CUT TO:

EXT. MOON'S SURFACE -- SPACE

BOB takes a step, and then another, and JUMPS ACROSS A CHASM performing an enormous leap:

KLARA'S VOICE
(over the radio)
Bob...Bob...God-damn it, Bob!

Bob lands with a smile and raises the SCANNER on his wrist. He turns his body all around until he hears a familiar PING--
DRED and HAM catch up to Bob, fatigued, shooting angry looks.

KLARA'S VOICE

You should be right on top of it now. Do you see anything?

BOB

Just rocks.

The radio CUTS OUT. The moon SHAKES. On the distant horizon another enormous blue-gray GEYSER bursts out from the ground.

On the surface you can really appreciate the enormous size of these things, rising up into space, blowing dust and debris in graceful arcs for hundreds of kilometers. It is gorgeous!

DRED

Will you look at that?

And as Bob, Dred, and Ham gaze up at the arching cloud of debris, they slowly realize it will COME DOWN ON TOP OF THEM.

HAM

Uh-oh.

All three scramble to find shelter. Bob hurries underneath a rocky outcropping as the DEBRIS STORM HITS, deadly rocks of all sizes striking the moon with great impact, raising more dust. An impenetrable CLOUD. Finally, the barrage stops....

Bob peeks his head out. Steps into the cloud, but can't see.

BOB

Where is everybody? I can't see a thing--

Up ahead a shape forms in the dust. Bob approaches it. He sees one of the guys, either Dred or Ham, we can't tell, standing there with his back toward Bob. Bob walks up, with:

BOB (CONT'D)

That was close... You okay?

Now we see the HELMET VISOR IS BROKEN, shattered by a small rock, the jagged opening giving us a clear view of DRED'S FACE, his mouth open in a silent scream. He looks dry and discolored. Almost PETRIFIED.

Bob stumbles backwards leaving Dred standing there upright in his spacesuit, his arms reaching out, frozen, a grim statue--

BOB
 (into his mike)
 Dead, he's dead--

Bob's scanner releases a PING. He looks at his wrist. The thing is going crazy now, *ping ping ping ping ping ping ping*.

The dust below his feet starts to rotate and drain away, like a bizarre WHIRLPOOL. Bob begins to SINK BENEATH THE SURFACE.

BOB
 We found it, Klara! It's
 under the--

Bob is sucked into the moon. His helmet goes under, and then there is only one of his hands, reaching up out of the ground briefly before it too is GONE.

The *ping ping ping* fades away...until we hear nothing at all.

INT. TUNNELS -- MOON

BOB emerges from a hole in the ceiling and lands hard on the floor of an underground complex. He rolls out of the PILLAR OF SAND streaming down from the surface and gets to his feet.

BOB
 Hello, is anybody reading
 me? This is Bob, respond.

There is no answer. Just STATIC. He starts down the tunnel.

BOB (CONT'D)
 I'm in some kind of under-
 ground complex.

This place looks like it's been slowly going to hell over the last few hundred thousand years. The familiar HEECHEE METAL IS CRACKED, and most passages are FILLING with sand and rock.

BOB
 This tunnel was definitely
 made by our missing aliens.
 Same luminous metal--I can
 see okay...

Suddenly a deep disturbing sound REVERBERATES THROUGH THE COMPLEX, as if the walls are moaning, protesting their fate--

BOB (CONT'D)
 ...but structural integrity
 may be a problem.

He starts down the tunnel. Passes an insane-looking room that is totally empty, as if it was stripped of its contents.

Bob looks into another room, and another, all just as barren.

BOB

Looks like they stripped the place clean before they left.

He turns around. It is DARKER here, more dirt coming in, and Bob turns on his HELMET LIGHT:

The beam illuminates a HEECHEE SHIP, shockingly close in the dark. Bob takes a step back--

It appears to be damaged. There is an OPEN PANEL on the hull exposing the alien mechanisms within. Bob shines his light.

BOB

There's a ship here. Some obvious damage--

Bob starts to move and HIS FOOT HITS SOMETHING. He looks down and sees an oddly-shaped METAL BOX resting on the floor.

Bob gets down on one knee. Studies it. He reaches for the box. Before his gloved fingertips can make contact it OPENS. Bob pulls back his hand, fast.

The interior of the box rises and fans out displaying over a dozen STRANGE OBJECTS WITHIN--

Bob reaches for the closest. Gently lifts it out. One end seems like a grip of sorts, although clearly not made for human hands. The other end is bizarrely designed but looks like it might fit around something, perhaps unlock something?

BOB

I'm holding a kind of weird screwdriver in my hand. It has a funny grip on one end, and a doohickey-thing on the other. Klara, are you getting this? We just hit the jackpot. How much will the company pay out for a complete set of alien tools...? [LAUGHS.] And all because some poor, unlucky Heechee broke-down a million years--

Bob still has a smile on his face when he hears the loud POUNDING, followed by a mechanized WHIR, and now a big KLANG.

You might say it sounded like a Heechee fixing his spaceship.

Bob darts to his feet. He doesn't know what to do with the weird screwdriver in his hand. Quickly finds a POUCH for it.

Bob pulls out his BLASTER and

The noise is coming from the far side of the ship. He throws his back against the wall and starts moving toward the sound, holding his weapon at ready. The SWEAT pours down his face--

Bob shuts his eyes. Just BREATHEs. Then charges forward and

There is nothing here. On the far side of the ship a LARGE HOSE IS BANGING on the hull, a slow COLUMN OF SAND hitting another exposed panel, and making all kinds of random SOUNDS.

Bob holsters his blaster. Heads back. He shakes his head, like what was he thinking, as he reaches down for the tools--

His gloved hand finds nothing. Bob looks around, all around. That Heechee toolbox is GONE.

BOB
 (into his mike)
*I'm not alone. I repeat, I
 am NOT alone down here!*

Suddenly Bob sees a DISTORTED SHADOW retreating down the hall, and takes off after it.

The entire complex RUMBLES. Bob is thrown off his feet and hits the wall hard. It hurts, but he stays upright. Sees the CEILING CRACK releasing dirt and rock into the tunnel and

Bob maneuvers through the underground complex as it continues to split open. Not easy in a spacesuit. He looks exhausted.

Bob runs around a corner, and stops in his tracks. For a split-second his light seems to illuminate a STRANGE SHAPE LOST IN A CLOUD OF THICK DUST, then the passage gives way and there is nothing that can be seen but the moon POURING IN and

BOB
 NO--

Bob runs toward the cave-in. Thrusts his arms into the sand.

BOB (CONT'D)
 I'll get you out, hold on,
 just hold on!

He tries to reach deeper and

BOB (CONT'D)
 (getting angry)
 I don't care what you are,
 you're not gonna die like
 this, you hear me?

Bob finally touches something, because his whole body tenses,
 like holy crap, it's in there!

Bob steels himself and pulls--

BOB
 I've got you... I've got
 you!

Bob calls forth all of his remaining strength to pull the
 Heechee to safety, his progress agonizingly slow...but soon
 the DIRT BEGINS TO SHIFT, like something large is coming out.

Bob releases a pained YELL and

He keeps fighting. Almost there. We are so close to seeing
 a living breathing Heechee and

The ceiling above him CRACKS--

Bob pulls one final time, and he must get whatever it is out
 because he stumbles backwards, sprawling on the floor just as

The crack in the ceiling BURSTS. A WALL OF SAND AND ROCK
 cuts him off from the Heechee, if that's really what it was.
 Bob has no choice but to run--

KLARA'S VOICE
 (very weak)
 ...Bob...come in, Bob...
 please respond...

Bob opens his mouth to respond, and SOMETHING GRABS HIS
 SHOULDER. He spins around and finds HAM staring back at him.

Ham doesn't bother saying hello. Immediately he attaches a
 small HOOK to Bob's spacesuit.

BOB
 No, wait--

HAM
 Sorry. Klara says you're
 leaving now!

By the time Bob knows what's happening, he is rising through
 a SHAFT toward the surface and

EXT. MOON'S SURFACE -- SPACE

BOB is lifted to the surface by a rickety-looking TRIPOD hastily constructed over a hole-- It swings Bob away from the opening, and roughly deposits him back onto solid ground.

KLARA'S VOICE

*If we don't get out of here
we're going to be permanent
residents!*

Since Bob went down all hell has broken loose. GEYSERS erupt in the distance. SMALL POCKETS of pressure collect under the surface until they burst releasing powerful COLUMNS OF STEAM.

Bob stands up. Looks around.

BOB'S P.O.V. Far in the distance the LANDER looks small and frail, the GROUND CRACKING, beginning to collapse around it--

BOB

Get that ship off the moon.

HAM rises from the opening, and looks at Bob. Are you nuts?!

KLARA'S VOICE

I'm not leaving you behind.

BOB

We'll never make it-- Ham
and I will rendezvous with
you in orbit.

HAM

How the hell are we going
to do that?!

Bob grows another crazy smile:

BOB

Don't worry, I got an idea!
A really bad idea...

And he runs toward a small pocket of pressure building up under the ground. The surface begins to CRACK. Bob leaps over the fissure as it BURSTS.

BOB RIDES THE COLUMN OF STEAM.

His face contorts as he accelerates high above the surface and leaves the moon behind. His radio SPUTTERS and cuts out.

The steam subsides but Bob keeps rising higher into orbit and

EXT. ABOVE THE MOON -- SPACE

BOB floats in orbit around the moon. He looks groggy. Weak.

BOB'S P.O.V. Through his fogged helmet visor, Bob sees the retreating surface of the MOON, then the great GAS-GIANT looming ominously above, now the STARS, then the MOON again--

For a brief moment we glimpse HAM sailing away in the other direction. TOWARD THE PLANET.

Bob mercifully passes out and

Gently he tumbles through the silent, peaceful void of space.

Eventually, he opens his eyes:

BOB'S P.O.V. Bob stares out at the STARS. And from those stars a figure slowly emerges. KLARA FLOATS TOWARD HIM, impossibly, without a suit on -- just as she was when Bob first saw her -- flying to save him, a fearsome lovely angel.

Bob looks pleased to see her. Immediately passes out again--

The impossible image of Klara FADES AWAY and is replaced by the less romantic sight of a long cable and a GRAPPLING HOOK.

INT. HEECHEE LANDER -- SPACE

BOB opens his eyes, groggily--

He is back inside the Heechee lander. Bob looks over and watches KLARA at the helm. They're still wearing spacesuits:

BOB
(foggy)
Hi, honey--

Klara wrestles with the strange controls, FLYING ERRATICALLY.

KLARA
Hello, Bob.

Bob looks left and right. Sees that he's the only passenger.

BOB
Where's Ham?

KLARA
Bad trajectory. Burned up
in the atmosphere.

BOB
 Something wrong with the
 ship?

Klara has yet to look at Bob--

KLARA
 You could say that, yeah.

Bob leans forward in his seat and slowly turns around to see.

BOB'S P.O.V. The rear of the lander is GONE, like a tin can
 ripped open by a giant. An ENORMOUS HOLE reveals the stars.
 Various shipboard items are still HURLING OUT into the void--

Bob turns around and faces front again, waking up real quick.
 He hits the RELEASE on his harness and takes the seat beside
 Klara, grabbing the second joystick to help her fly straight:

SAM'S VOICE
 You're coming in too fast--

KLARA
 No shit!

EXT. ABOVE THE MOON -- SPACE

THE LANDER RAMS INTO THE SHIP with great velocity. DOCKING
 CLAMPS automatically lock turning the two modules back into
 one, but the exterior of the craft bends and ruptures SPEWING
 GAS AND LIQUID out into space. The ship spins END-OVER-END--

CUT TO:

INT. THE MAIN CABIN -- SPACE

The interior of the ship is badly damaged. BOB, KLARA, and
 SAM sit around the small table watching each other nervously.

BOB (V.O.)
 The docking damaged our life-
 support systems... and with
 three remaining crew members
 equally fond of breathing, we
 were going to run out of air.

Now we see the DECK OF CARDS.

BOB (V.O.)
 But two of us might make it--

Klara picks up the deck. Very thoroughly shuffles the cards.

Klara deals one card to Sam, one to Bob, then one to herself.

She turns hers over first. A good card, not great. Sam goes next. So far he has the low card. Bob looks at his card but doesn't reveal it. We search his face for some sign, a clue.

CUT TO:

INT. THE FREEZER -- SPACE

BOB opens the door revealing the icy claustrophobic interior of the strange Heechee FREEZER. He shares a look with KLARA.

SAM stands some distance away:

SAM

I'll give you guys a minute alone. Sorry, Bob, but you know, better you than me...

Sam pushes off through the cabin. Klara waits for him to go.

KLARA

What the hell are you doing?
I dealt you--

BOB

A high card, thanks, baby...
I have other plans.

Bob reaches in his pocket for that weird Heechee SCREWDRIVER.

KLARA

What's that?

BOB

I don't know. I guarantee nobody knows. But if we hand it over to the company we'll never see it again--

KLARA

So you want to turn yourself into a popsicle?

Bob looks excited. Alive. And he has no intention of dying:

BOB

This is the big one, Klara. The Heechee are out there somewhere. And you and me? We're going to find them...

Bob and Klara continue to speak, desperately, hurriedly; and suddenly they kiss, like it may be their last, as we listen--

BOB (V.O.)

And so, my mission report is nearly finished. We lost two crewmen and I'm set for cold storage. The ship is damaged beyond our ability to repair. I saw nothing unusual on the surface of the moon or during my time beneath the surface.

(short pause)

And no artifacts were found.

Bob slips feet-first into the freezer, hides the screwdriver in his jumpsuit, and crosses his arms in front of his chest ...like a corpse in a coffin.

Klara closes the door. FROST IS FORMING ON HIS FACE. Bob looks around, his body shivering, and finally shuts his eyes:

BOB (V.O.)

This is R. Broadhead, mission number 29-140...signing off--

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GATEWAY DOCK -- DAY

A SECURITY TEAM wearing containment suits slips a familiar-looking ROD into the SOCKET of a DAMAGED SHIP. It opens and

INT. HEECHEE SHIP -- DAY

The SECURITY TEAM enters the craft. The interior is damp and dark. They walk around. SAM is unconscious on the floor. KLARA looks at them, weakly--

SECURITY GUY

Oh. You're alive-- We were wondering.

He reaches into the pocket of his containment suit, pulls out a hundred dollar BILL...and hands it to the woman beside him.

INT. THRU SECURITY -- DAY

BOB lies on a medical GURNEY being rushed down the corridor--

He is several shades of blue and FROZEN STIFF. KLARA rushes to the stretcher trying to see him. The SECURITY MEN grab her, but she doesn't go without a struggle, kicking her legs:

KLARA

Let me go. Let me... Bob!

The HEAVY-SET NURSE seen earlier quickly wheels Bob through several short crazily-winding tunnels. They pass SHIKY. He turns about and flaps his wings faster, keeping up with them.

SHIKY

Bob. You didn't take me on your mission. You said you would take me, Bob--

The nurse gestures with her arm, like she's trying to swat away a huge, irritating bug:

NURSE

He can't hear you, now *buzz off!*

Shiky stops chasing them and just hangs in the air, his wings fluttering, watching Bob go.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

BOB lies on a high-tech hospital bed with HOSES sticking out of his mouth and nose. WARMING PADS have been placed all over his body, his frozen clothes undisturbed. A web of WIRES stretches to the loud HUMMING machinery around the bed.

TWO DOCTORS bend over him. One feels for his pulse, sort of optimistic. The other lifts Bob's eyelid and shines a LIGHT.

DOCTOR #1

Pulse is okay. You know, we might actually save this guy.

DOCTOR #2

We saved that guy last week--

DOCTOR #1

You mean the vegetable?

The doctors finish up for the moment and leave Bob all alone.

The seconds pass. The machines HUM. When he thinks enough time has passed, BOB OPENS HIS EYES. He scans the hospital room, staring intensely at the ceiling directly overhead.....

INT. DEBRIEFING ROOM -- DAY

BOB sits in a stark room with several warm TOWELS wrapped around him, a funny-looking HOT PAD perched precariously atop his head, and a steaming cup of COFFEE cradled in his hands--

On the other end of this long table sits assistant director EMMA FOTHER, no less imposing in a one-on-one than she was earlier addressing the new arrivals. She scans her NOTE PAD.

EMMA

And why didn't you document
your moon walk?

BOB

Dred had the camera. He was
dead. At the time, I didn't
think to take it.

EMMA

Well Mr. Broadhead, I think
we've "grilled you" enough--
(short pause)
I trust you're feeling well.

She smiles. Bob welcomes it.

BOB

I *am* very tired.

EMMA

Of course you are. Just one
more question...

BOB

Sure.

EMMA

Where did you hide it?

BOB

Excuse me--

EMMA

The artifact you acquired on
the moon. Where is it, you
son-of-a-bitch?

He studies her. She studies him. Neither one of them moves.

The tension grows and grows until Bob suddenly breaks out in a big smile, wagging his finger at Emma, like, that was a good one, you really got me! Now they both LAUGH in relief--

BOB
You really had me going for
a second there, Ms. Fother!

EMMA
Emma, please.

BOB
All right...

EMMA
(explaining)
You have to understand, not
everyone appreciates what the
Gateway Corporation gives the
human race. New technologies.
New sources of power. Food.
New worlds to live in. We've
got a whole universe out here
to discover, and bring home.

Bob nods his head. *Of course.*

EMMA (CONT'D)
Not content to turn in their
find and accept the generous
bonus that awaits them, some
people attempt to hide things
from us and pursue their own
individual goals, for what
they mistakenly believe will
be greater wealth and fame--

BOB
I can't understand that kind
of thinking, Emma.

EMMA
I'm glad, Bob. Unless there
is something else you'd care
to add to the record, I'd say
this debriefing is concluded.

BOB
Great. So, I'm free to go?

Emma hits a **BUTTON** on her desk and the door opens behind him.
Bob stands up. He doesn't see the **SECURITY GUARDS** coming in:

EMMA
On behalf of all of us, I'd
like to thank you again for
your interest in Gateway...

To Bob's surprise, the security guards take hold of his arms. That pad falls off his head--

BOB
What is this?

Emma casually refers to her personal computer SCREEN. Types.

EMMA
As you know...room and board on Gateway is expensive, and your per capita ran out the day you left on mission 29-140. I'm afraid you're breathing air you can no longer afford.

BOB
How about a job? Give me a job. I can work--

EMMA
There are no positions available at the moment.

BOB
(struggling)
Come on, talk to me! Let's make a deal...

She deactivates the RECORDER.

EMMA
Off the record, Bob, I do bend the rules for people who get *results*-- Can you think of anything you may have forgotten to tell me?

They wait. Bob doesn't say anything...and they drag him out.

EMMA
My men will escort you to the nearest airlock, where a ship is in final preparation for Earth departure. Do be on it.

Emma gets back to work, forgetting about him, adding by rote:

EMMA (CONT'D)
The Gateway Corporation cannot guarantee the availability of another shuttle to receive you.

INT. TUNNELS -- DAY

KLARA tries to look nonchalant pacing the corridor outside the debriefing room. The door opens and BOB emerges escorted by those grim SECURITY GUARDS.

Bob and Klara share a furtive glance before the guards take his arms and lead him away. Klara can do nothing but follow.

They pass a SCREEN displaying a PICTURE OF BOB with a really fake smile. It's roughly animated, like he's waving goodbye:

VOICE OF GATEWAY

*Gateway bids a fond farewell
to Robert Broadhead, leaving
us to pursue other interests.
Thanks for everything, Bob--
and good luck!*

A motley CROWD OF PEOPLE have stopped at a rocky INTERSECTION formed by two crossing tunnels. Bob and the guards stop like everyone else, and Bob looks:

BOB'S P.O.V. That UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECT seen earlier speeds toward the intersection, a metal ball with bug arms...

Everybody stands there bored, like pedestrians waiting for a light to change. Klara squeezes through to the front of the pack, close to Bob. They share an intense look. Are you thinking what I'm thinking...?

The ancient Heechee object flies down the hall, so fast it's hazardous, WHIRRING madly and

At the last possible instant Bob and Klara run for the other side, barely making it across.

The security guards follow them into the passage a second later and are STRUCK BY THE SPHERE, lifted off their feet, and thrown into the walls. They slide to the floor out cold.

The object continues on like nothing happened and disappears around the far corner. Bob and Klara hurry into an ELEVATOR.

INT. ELEVATOR -- DAY

The doors shut. KLARA immediately turns to BOB and puts her hands all over him, as if trying to make sure he's all there.

KLARA

You're alive--

A second later she SLAPS him:

KLARA (CONT'D)
That's for making me worry!

Bob's mouth begins to form an "OW" until Klara pulls him close and plants a kiss on his lips. This response he likes.

KLARA
So what's the plan?

BOB
The what?

KLARA
The plan. You have a plan, right? Please tell me you have a plan.

BOB
We go back where I stashed the screwdriver, avoid the guards, escape the asteroid, find the Heechee wherever they are, have the greatest adventure in human history and live happily ever after.

KLARA
(not convinced)
There is no plan, is there?

The tiny SCREEN in the elevator plays an informative CARTOON.

VOICE OF GATEWAY
Remember, if you encounter a collapsing neutron star, run a full gravitational scan...

Bob and Klara turn to the screen. See a cartoon SHIP with a SCARED FACE turning around and heading back the way it came--

VOICE OF GATEWAY
... and if you see a black hole -- run for your lives!

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

BOB and KLARA sneak into his old hospital room. Their feet pass a sign reading "CAUTION!" We see a vacuum-shaped ROBOT MOPPING AND WAXING the floor.

Bob leaves a trail of FOOTPRINTS as he hurries across the room toward the hospital bed.

KLARA

You must have melted all
over the floor.

Bob steps on the bed and jumps toward the ceiling, grabbing a bar and hanging there. He reaches his hand up through a CEILING PANEL, and feels around for the Heechee screwdriver--

Bob grows worried. He raises himself higher and sticks his head into the NARROW SPACE between the man-made ceiling and the original jagged walls of the asteroid. Bob looks around.

But there is nothing up here.

INT. MEDICAL TUNNEL -- DAY

BOB and KLARA step uncertainly from the room and lean against the wall. The passage is crowded with DOCTORS, PATIENTS, and VISITORS rushing around. A SCREEN runs DAILY CLASSIFIED ADS:

VOICE OF GATEWAY

*Need to cry? I can help you
find your pain. Phone 88-622.*

KLARA

(reaching)

Are you sure this is where
you hid it? Maybe...

Bob sees someone in the crowd and straightens up, quickly coming to attention, his eyes zeroing in on DANE METCHNIKOV--

Dane is involved in some no-doubt dubious negotiation with a WOUNDED PATIENT. He glances around nervously...and sees Bob.

Dane does an incriminating double-take, like Bob is the last person he wanted to see. Suddenly, Dane turns tail and runs.

INT. GATEWAY MARKET -- DAY

BOB AND KLARA pursue DANE through a tunnel and out into an open market. It is total chaos. They push THROUGH THE CROWD trying to keep pace with him...but all too quickly Bob and Klara find themselves separated, with Dane nowhere in sight--

A SELLER holding a STACK OF BOOKS in his arms approaches Bob.

BOOKSELLER

"Everything You Always Wanted
to Know About the Heechee" --
that's a book you gotta read!

Bob sees SECURITY GUARDS moving his way. He turns his back to them, like he's just a guy buying a book, handing over a BILL and taking his copy. Quickly, the bookseller gets lost.

Bob pretends to read as the guards pass, thumbing through the book. ALL THE PAGES ARE BLANK.

He drops the book, and suddenly spots Klara trapped in the crowd, gesturing wildly. Bob sees Dane slip down a passage--

INT. UNEXPLORED REGION -- DAY

These passages are dark, the walls less luminescent, still covered in a thousand years of dust. BOB and KLARA run into an empty tunnel. A small ROCK falls on Bob and they look up:

DANE is trying to climb into what looks like a VENTILATION SHAFT, his small legs kicking wildly. Bob pulls him down and

DANE

Whatever I did, I'm innocent.

Bob lifts Dane and turns him upside-down, shaking him to get everything out of his pockets. A whole pile of CONTRABAND GOODS falls to the floor, cigarettes and nylon stockings, pills and chocolate bars, currency from countless nations and

DANE (CONT'D)

Just tell me what you want
and I can get it -- cheap!

Bob turns him upright. He and Klara share an uncertain look.

KLARA

If you didn't do anything,
why are you running away?

DANE

Because you're chasing me!

They hear the sound of approaching FOOTSTEPS. Bob lets him go, and Dane scurries off down the passage. Bob and Klara quickly duck out of view as SECURITY GUARDS enter the tunnel.

They watch the guards. The seconds pass. Bob doesn't notice something reach out for Klara and PULL HER INTO THE DARKNESS.

The security guards move closer. Bob sees Klara is gone. He takes a step into the dark and

INT. SPHERICAL CHAMBER -- DAY

BOB enters the dark chamber, discovers there is no step at all and DROPS. He rolls down a slope and hits bottom. KLARA is already sitting up, a bit disheveled and rubbing her head.

MALE VOICE

There are dark, musty places
still untouched by human hands.
Until recently, when I began
my own expeditions deeper into
the asteroid, this was one of
them.

They hear a CLICK and see PROFESSOR HEGRAMET standing beside a portable human-made LIGHT--

PROFESSOR

Professor Hegramet...at your
service!

They are inside a large spherical chamber, walls perfectly round and smooth, a big ball.

Bob and Klara stand up. Look. The rock is oddly reflective.

KLARA

Is it...a tomb?

PROFESSOR

The lack of adornment on the
walls discourages the notion.
And there was nothing hidden
within.

BOB

Maybe the aliens took what-
ever was in here with them.

PROFESSOR

Yes. But then why go to all
the trouble of concealing an
empty chamber?

KLARA

And who were they hiding it
from? Others of their kind
...or us?

The Professor sits on the slope. Pulls out a PIPE to smoke.

PROFESSOR

I do not have the answers you seek, but I am certain all of this -- the ships, Gateway, the artifacts scattered across the stars -- is here for a reason.

BOB

(jumping on that)
What reason?

PROFESSOR

More prospectors ship out day-by-day, but few return. What happens to the ones who never come back? Do they simply die in the icy cold of space, or is there a more clandestine fate awaiting them? Could this be a *collection trap*, the human race systematically captured by the Heechee, and subjected to obscene alien experiments--

Professor Hegramet strikes a MATCH. Stops to light his pipe.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

On the other hand...it might be an elaborate *intelligence test*. Maybe the Heechee have retreated to a distant corner of the galaxy, waiting a millennia for a civilization smart enough to complete the ancient puzzle and find them!

The Professor takes a long PUFF from the pipe, and concludes.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

Perhaps this once-great society simply died out long before our species crawled from the muck, and this is all what it appears to be: an old forgotten rock.

KLARA

Why did you help us, professor?

PROFESSOR

Isn't that why we come here, my dear? To test ourselves and find out what we're made of.

Then he grows a devilish grin:

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)
 Besides... if you're running
 from the guards, one can
 assume your mission produced
 interesting results.

Bob and Klara share a look and quickly agree, let's tell him.

BOB
 We call it a screwdriver...

PROFESSOR
 Ah. And where is this screw-
 driver now?

BOB
 I don't know. But I saw
 something out there, something
 alive. And I touched it.

PROFESSOR
 Indeed.

KLARA
 You believe us?

PROFESSOR
 Consider the likelihood of our
 missing aliens, so meticulous
 in cleaning up after themselves
 ...leaving tools lying around.

Bob and Klara hadn't considered that. The professor smokes.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)
 You were out there looking for
 the Heechee, but they may have
 found you.

CUT TO:

INT. UNEXPLORED REGION -- DAY

BOB, KLARA, and PROFESSOR HEGRAMET struggle to slide a ROCKY DOOR back into place. It's not easy. When it finally closes the wall appears solid, the spherical room completely hidden.

The professor is the first to turn around and see something--

PROFESSOR
 Oh, bugger.
 Bob spins around and takes down the first SECURITY GUARD with his old reliable punch in the jaw. ANOTHER GUARD runs up and Bob throws him into the wall -- where Klara finishes him off.

The NEXT GUARD lunges. Bob blocks the blow and takes him out. He shares a relieved look with Klara and the Professor.

A split-second later all three of them are STRUCK by a tazer-- Their bodies stiffen and shake...and then drop to the floor. MORE SECURITY GUARDS run over.

INT. A TUNNEL -- DAY

BOB hangs limply from the arms of the SECURITY GUARDS as they move him through the tunnels. He starts to come around when they change direction and drag him backwards into an AIRLOCK.

INT. AIRLOCK -- DAY

The SECURITY GUARDS unceremoniously deposit BOB on the floor, and quickly walk back out again. The inner door slides shut.

Bob struggles to stand. The airlock is claustrophobic, dark, and ominous. He turns toward the outer door and sees STARS. Bob POUNDS on the thick glass:

BOB

Hey, there's no ship here.
Where's the ship to Earth?

The grinning face of a security guard appears in the window--

SECURITY GUARD

It left 5 minutes ago. So
long, sucker!

The guard leaves. Bob POUNDS on the glass until the lights turn RED. The ALARM sounds--

A tiny SCREEN inside the airlock displays a RELIGIOUS SYMBOL.

VOICE OF GATEWAY

*Staring death in the face?
Join the Church of the
Heechee... it's later than
you think!*

Bob waits for the inevitable. The outer door opens and with a brief deafening BURST he is violently BLOWN OUT. His body hurls toward the distant stars.

EXT. INTO THE VOID -- SPACE

BOB tumbles helplessly into space... and suddenly STOPS, as if caught by an invisible hand.

INT. WORKER'S POD -- SPACE

BOB looks surprised as powerful JETS OF AIR blow in his face. There is the sound of a HATCH closing, LIGHTS come on, and we see Bob is tangled in WEBBING--

EXT. WORKER'S POD -- SPACE

A common MAINTENANCE POD HOVERS IN SPACE some distance from the asteroid and the small airlock door Bob just blew out of.

INT. WORKER'S POD -- SPACE

BOB opens his mouth and desperately BREATHES as the cargo bin repressurizes. NORMAL SKIN COLOR slowly returns to his face.

Soon a pod door slides open and EMMA FOTHER enters the cabin.

She wears SPACE SHOES that enable her to stick to the floor, as long as she walks precisely, each step accompanied by that annoying Velcro RIPPING sound--

Bob turns his head and follows her progress across the pod, like he can't believe this. Emma speaks into a miniscule HEADSET. Ignoring him for now:

EMMA

No, cancel that, reschedule for next week, and hold all calls.

She glances at Bob for the first time. Not happy to see him.

EMMA (CONT'D)

My twelve o'clock is here--

Emma pulls off the headset. Takes a seat. A VELCRO PAD ON HER BUTTOCKS enables her to remain in place without floating.

EMMA

Thanks to you, my whole day is ruined.

Bob lies tangled in the webbing like food for a giant spider. He grows suddenly furious and:

BOB
Cram it, lady!

EMMA
Oh don't be a baby.

BOB
You almost killed me--

EMMA
The Gateway Corporation has authorized me to speak with you in private.

BOB
What do we have to talk about?

EMMA
You went back to Terminal Hospital.

BOB
Did I?

EMMA
You left your footprints on the floor.

BOB
So I was there... so what?

EMMA
Imagine what it could mean, Bob-- A genuine Heechee tool could mean a way to open the drive mechanism in their starships, without blowing everything up. A tool could mean finding out how the drive works and building our own. A tool could mean almost anything.

BOB
(pushing her)
Sounds real valuable.

EMMA
Yes. Do you have it?

BOB

No.

Emma rises from her seat accompanied by a giant RIPPING sound from the Velco pad on her ass.

BOB (CONT'D)

But I know who does.

She sits back down and thinks.

EMMA

A colossal bluff--

BOB

Make me a deal and find out.

EMMA

The deal will be as follows:
You will recover the object
and bring it to me. If the
artifact is valuable you can
expect a reasonable bonus...
minus any and all expenses
incurred by the company as
a result of your subterfuge.
If you fail to recover the
item, or do not hand it over
to me immediately upon its
recovery, you will be blown
out an airlock -- only this
time, there won't be anyone
here to catch you.

(short pause)

Are the terms satisfactory?

Bob doesn't really think so, but is in no position to dicker.

CUT TO:

INT. CORRIDOR -- DAY

BOB and EMMA FOTHER step out of the airlock into a tunnel.
KLARA is already standing there, watched by a SECURITY GUARD.

As soon as Emma gets in range Klara cocks back her arm to
sock her in the jaw. The guard grabs her wrist and stops it.

EMMA

Striking a corporate officer
is prohibited by sub-section
two, paragraph seven of your
Memorandum of Agreement--

That just makes Klara want to punch her more. She lunges at Emma again and the guard struggles to hold on, placing his hand on her mouth to MUFFLE a string of intended obscenities.

Emma turns and hurries off--

The guard lets Klara loose. Bob immediately takes her arm, and leads her the other way:

BOB

Come on.

KLARA

Where are we going?

BOB

To see a guy.

KLARA

What guy?

BOB

The only guy who doesn't
leave *footprints*.

INT. LITTERED TUNNEL -- DAY

SHIKY brandishes his BROOM sweeping SHARDS OF HEECHEE METAL into a pile, as we saw him do before, wings flapping happily.

He looks up and finds BOB AND KLARA standing in the tunnel watching. Shiky doesn't try to escape, but immediately looks guilty, wings not so perky--

SHIKY

You said you would take me,
Bob, but you didn't mean it
... just like all the rest.

Shiky lowers his head like a little boy, and slowly comes up with the Heechee SCREWDRIVER. He raises his arm toward them.

SHIKY (CONT'D)

Please, forgive me, Bob...

INT. ANOTHER PASSAGE -- DAY

BOB and KLARA walk through the tunnels with the SCREWDRIVER. They don't make it far before a group of SECURITY GUARDS step

into view, blocking the passage ahead. Bob and Klara stop, like they know this is the end of the line, they're finished:

KLARA

I guess we're luckier than most -- we shipped out and lived to tell about it.

BOB

It's not enough, Klara.

KLARA

It's never enough. Come on. Let's give them the screwdriver, cash our check...and go get drunk.

She looks at Bob. Sees the look in his eyes. And she knows:

KLARA (CONT'D)

Aw, nuts--

Bob grabs her hand and they run down a branching tunnel. The security guards GIVE CHASE and

INT. MAINTENANCE TUNNEL -- DAY

BOB and KLARA run into a passage lined with MAN-MADE LOCKERS and equipment. They duck out of view and hope for the best--

The SECURITY GUARDS follow them a few seconds later, quickly look around, guess incorrectly, and charge off again. Far down the tunnel we glimpse MORE SECURITY GUARDS searching and

KLARA

This is hopeless. I know you want to find the Heechee. Me too-- But there's no way off this asteroid.

BOB

Maybe one way.

Bob wraps his arm around her waist, and pulls Klara close, laying an old-fashioned kiss on her lips. She is surprised--

KLARA

What was *that* for?

BOB

I've got another really bad idea. Don't be mad.

Bob pushes her backwards into one of the lockers lining the tunnel. He shuts the door and LOCKS IT before her face can fully register what's going on.

Klara begins to POUND on it, and Bob hurries down the tunnel.

KLARA (O.S.)
*Open this door. What are
 you doing? Let me out!
 You come back here, Bob--*

INT. LAUNCH FLOOR -- NIGHT

The room is dark and deserted, shut-down for the day. The grizzled LAUNCH CAPTAIN is asleep in his chair on top of the high platform... and he SNORES.

BOB (O.S.)
 I want to ship out.

The launch captain jerks awake. Sees BOB. Checks a screen--

LAUNCH CAPTAIN
 Broadhead... You're on the
 no-fly list.

BOB
 You can let me take a "one,"
 can't you? The rules say
 anybody can ship out on a
 one -- anytime they want to,
 right?

LAUNCH CAPTAIN
 Yeah... but that's because
 single-man ships usually
 don't, you know, *come back*.

Bob raises his completed information FORM, and SLAPS it down.

BOB
 I'll take it.

CUT TO:

White letters and numbers PRINT quickly across a dark screen.

MISSION 31-505
 Vessel 118, Voyage 010S201, Crew R. Broadhead

CUT TO:

INT. ONE-MAN SHIP -- SPACE

BOB sits inside a claustrophobic metal cylinder, a cluttered alien garbage can, completely alone and with no room to move.

BOB (V.O.)

This is Bob Broadhead's log--
I'm racing through warp space
never to be seen again... if
you believe that sorta thing.

Now we realize Bob is staring at the strange BLACK DRIVE BOX.

BOB (V.O.)

The drive box has been opened
before by a curious, desperate,
or just plain crazy few who
didn't live long enough to see
inside. Of course they didn't
have my Heechee screwdriver...

He pulls out the alien SCREWDRIVER. Just stares at the box--

BOB (V.O.)

Still, if anybody ever plays
this back, I'll warn you up
front: the next thing you hear
may be a really big KA-BOOM.

DISSOLVE TO:

Bob studies the box. He is tired and covered in sweat, with some STUBBLE on his face. Several days have passed at least.

BOB (V.O.)

I study the box for days 'til
I'm sure I know how it opens.

Bob makes his decision. He touches the screwdriver to one spot and an ENERGY DISCHARGE THROWS HIM BACK into a bulkhead.

He slumps to the floor, curled in a ball, knocked out cold...

DISSOLVE TO:

By now, Bob is definitely on his way toward GROWING A BEARD--
He studies the weird alien box.

Suddenly Bob tries again, approaching the problem from a new perspective. He eases the screwdriver into a small recess, and wiggles it around a little.

A small POINT of light mysteriously appears over the box. As Bob watches in surprise, the point DRAWS A SHAPE in the air, and inside the shape an IMAGE abruptly appears. It must be an alien communications system, some kind of ancient Heechee television screen materializing suddenly out of nothingness--

Bob stares at the picture. Can't make it out. It's like a close-up of some strange bumps...and maybe a few weird hairs?

Then the thing on the screen turns around and Bob sees an ALIEN EYEBALL STARING BACK AT HIM. We see it BLINK once, but not like any human eye blinks.

For a brief moment Bob watches the eye watching him-- And then the ship fills with a HORRIBLE NOISE. Could this be the Heechee language?! As if the alien is screaming in anger and

Suddenly the eyeball is GONE. The strange screen in the air FIZZLES OUT and Bob is alone--

BOB (V.O.)

Maybe I found a recording, a message from a million years ago. Yeah, right. Or maybe I just phoned the Heechee -- and they hung up on me. Was that alien for "hi, how are ya?", or "go away?" Either being the case, I guess they know I'm out here. Good... because I'm not goin' away--

DISSOLVE TO:

Bob sports a FULL DIRTY BEARD and lies curled on the floor, staring up at the drive box as he absently taps his alien screwdriver against the metal of the ship. We listen to the constant maddening KTANG...KTANG...KTANG-- And slowly, Bob entertains a new possibility. He looks down at his strange tool as he keeps tapping the floor: KTANG...KTANG...KTANG...

DISSOLVE TO:

Bob stands facing the box. Suddenly he rushes wildly forward and raises the screwdriver high in the air, holding it like an ice pick and bringing it down hard, striking the drive and

Bob looks at his hand. The screwdriver is VIBRATING madly and it hurts, his arm shaking. It's not a screwdriver at all but a Heechee tuning fork, RELEASING A HIGH-PITCHED WHINE and

The diamond shape drive responds fast, OPENING LIKE A PUZZLE BOX, the light within bathing the interior in an EERIE GLOW--

Bob watches in genuine wonder as an important-looking CONTROL BUTTON rises up out of the box.

BOB
(girding himself)
Well, here goes nothin'...

Bob hits the button and the SHIP CHANGES COURSE, lurching out of control. He finds a hand-hold and hangs on for dear life.

DISSOLVE TO:

Bob sleeps curled on the floor. Slowly he FLOATS in the air. Bob wakes excitedly and pulls himself to the equipment, flipping a SWITCH. He checks the SCRATCHES he made to count:

BOB
It's Day 51. The ship has
dropped out of warp!

Suddenly there is a loud DOOM, like something outside just made contact with the hull, and the entire ship TILTS and shakes. Bob checks his primitive SCANNER and hears the PING.

BOB (CONT'D)
There's something outside.
I think I'm being towed--
The scanner is picking up
pure Heechee metal, off
the chart, something huge.

Ominous sounds continue to REVERBERATE through the bulkheads into the ship, like the eerie haunts heard in a submarine. There is a THUD and Bob drops to the floor. Gravity's back--

BOB
The ship has stopped....
I've landed. Is this the
homeworld of the aliens?

There are more sounds, elusive, always moving -- CREATURES GATHERING OUTSIDE THE SHIP. There is a BANG at the hatch and

BOB
They're at the hatch. I'll
keep recording as long as I
can... They're coming in--

The hatch begins to OPEN and:

BOB (CONT'D)
(to the Heechee)
Take me to your leader!

A familiar Gateway SECURITY TEAM stares down at Bob from inside their protective suits.

RUDE GUY
Whatever, dick-head.

CUT TO:

INT. DEBRIEFING ROOM -- DAY

BOB slumps on one side of the table, with his filthy beard and torn clothes. EMMA FOTHER scans the SINGLE-PAGE REPORT--

EMMA
So let me get this straight:
you went absolutely nowhere.

BOB
Where's Klara?

EMMA
Who? Oh, yes...Klara. She
left for Earth, weeks ago--
You took off in a one, Bob,
did you think she was going
to spend the rest of her life
waiting for you to no-show?
She did throw you a party...
sort of a memorial service.

BOB
How was it?

EMMA
I didn't attend.

BOB
Why don't you just do what-
ever it is you're going to
do to me.

EMMA
Do to you, Bob? I'm sure I
don't know what you mean...

Emma opens a folder. Takes out a CHECK. Slides it across the table toward him and says:

EMMA (CONT'D)
The company has authorized me
to award you a five thousand
dollar science bonus for com-
ing back alive.

Bob is surprised. He picks up the check. Just stares at it. Now Emma reaches back into her folder and pulls out a WORK ASSIGNMENT. Slides it to Bob.

EMMA

I've also been authorized to give you a work assignment. The pay is good enough to cover your continued room and board here on Gateway.

BOB

You must be *pissed*.

Emma doesn't respond right away. She turns off the RECORDER.

EMMA

I'm not upset, Bob. Would you like to know why?

BOB

I don't think so, no.

EMMA

You took your shot at the big time, and missed.

BOB

Just wait, on the next trip--

EMMA

A thousand men and women have come here, like you, with the arrogant presumption they can rock the universe. The lucky ones die in space-- The rest slowly waste away on this asteroid, still talking about the next trip.

They stare one another down. TWO SECURITY GUARDS enter, and:

BOB

Are we done?

EMMA

Oh, one more thing....

Emma opens up her drawer, takes out that HEECHEE SCREWDRIVER, and tosses it across the table like it's just worthless junk.

EMMA (CONT'D)

You can have this back.

He takes the tool. Confused.

EMMA

Last month, a crew returned with a dozen. A week after that, another ship brought back a whole crate-- We've got so many of these damned things they're going on sale in the gift shop downstairs.

She looks over at the guards:

EMMA (CONT'D)

See that he gets cleaned up, then issue him a broom, and put him to work.

INT. CORRIDOR -- DAY

BOB walks listlessly through the tunnel in his filthy beard and torn clothes, accompanied by the SECURITY GUARDS. Now SHIKY flies alongside, flapping his wings and smiling at Bob.

SHIKY

Bob, we all had a good time at your "Bob is dead" party.

Shiky has a hard time keeping pace in the thickening CROWD, and starts falling behind--

SHIKY (CONT'D)

When it is time to ship out again, don't forget me. In orbit I'm as good as anybody! If you need a crewman, you will think of me, yes, Bob?

Bob doesn't say anything. Just lets the guards lead him by the arms. A SCREEN runs photographs of CLOTHES and odd JUNK:

VOICE OF GATEWAY

Attention, attention... Our public auction of personal effects of non-returnees was an enormous success-- A big thanks to all who attended!

(short pause)

In a related topic, would whoever has Bob Broadhead's things please return them?

There is a sudden BLOCKAGE in the tunnel, dozens of people gathering around to see. One of the security guards leans close to a MAN IN THE CROWD:

SECURITY GUARD

What's up?

MAN IN CROWD

Ship came in... Once-in-a-lifetime score.

SECURITY GUARD

No kidding.

MAN IN CROWD

Found another asteroid just like this one. They're calling it "Gateway Two".... Fifty million dollar bonus, plus royalties on every dollar the new Gateway earns for the rest of their lives.

SECURITY GUARD

Here they come--

Everybody moves back against the wall as MEDICAL PERSONNEL rush past with STRETCHERS carrying the UNCONSCIOUS CREW of the lucky ship. They look weak and dehydrated. Almost dead.

We don't recognize anyone until the very last gurney rolls by holding SHERI. Her eyes lock on Bob, and she smiles, weakly:

SHERI

(semi-conscious)

...Hiya, Bob...

Bob watches Sheri roll away.

SECURITY GUARD

You know her?

BOB

(remembering)

Yeah. She asked me to go along. I said no.

The two security guards share a look. Can't help but LAUGH. They SLAP Bob on the back...

SECURITY GUARD

What a chump!

INT. UNEXPLORED REGION -- DAY

BOB is shaved and wearing a new jumpsuit, but looks no less downtrodden, pushing his BROOM.

He sweeps up those weird METAL SHARDS littering the asteroid.

Bob stops working. Something is bothering him. He sits on top of his pile of junk and reaches into his pocket. Takes out the Heechee SCREWDRIVER....

Bob stares at it with a raw mix of emotions. Finally anger wins over the rest and he throws the thing across the tunnel.

It hits the wall with a loud KTANG, and falls to the floor. Bob walks over. Picks it up--

The screwdriver is VIBRATING in his hand, like it did before.

Bob doesn't see it, but behind him those strange reflective shards he'd been sweeping are SUSPENDED IN THE AIR, hanging there, jagged pieces of metal floating high above the floor--

Bob sticks the screwdriver back in his pocket. Like he can't stand it anymore. Just wants to pretend nothing happened and

Bob turns around. He doesn't notice anything out of the ordinary, because now the metal is BACK ON THE FLOOR where it should be. Bob keeps sweeping.

Soon he is pushed from behind--

Bob turns around to see that ENORMOUS MAN from the tavern who wanted to fight over the stool.

BOB

Oh, great.

Now DANE METCHNIKOV steps out from behind the giant, looking and sounding braver than usual:

DANE

Howzitgoin', Bob? My giant friend here was lookin' for you. I hope you don't mind, I happened to mention that you were a broom jockey now.

BOB

I'm busy--

Bob tries to return to his sweeping, but the enormous man takes the broom away, CRACKS it in half like a twig and gives

it back. Bob looks at the broken handle, like he knows there is no way out of this fight...

He drops the broom, turns to the giant, and socks him in the gut. The blow has no effect, and Bob prepares for the worst.

DANE

He wants me to tell you it's nothing personal, but he has a reputation to keep. When this is all over he'd like to buy you a drink, as soon as you're able to swallow again.

The enormous man cocks back his big arm, throws a punch, and hits METAL. The giant YELLS OUT and stumbles back. In pain.

BOB IS ENCASED IN ALIEN ARMOR.

The strange shrapnel littering the tunnel is rising from the floor and assembling around him, the jagged pieces fitting together, like a crazy puzzle.

Bob turns around and around, trying to get it off, swatting at the shards, a hopeless battle against a tornado of metal--

Dane watches the LAST SHARDS circle around Bob until the shapes find their matching spots and slip into place, covering Bob from head-to-toe.

The shards reflect light like a hundred BLINDING mirrors and Dane backs away, trying to shield his face and falling down. The giant turns and runs away.

Bob's surprised eyes stare out from two narrow slits in the armor. He looks down at his body the best he can, raising his arms and staring at his hands, encased in Heechee metal--

DANE

Wow-- How did you do that?
Can you breathe in there?
Hey, we're partners on this,
right, Bob-o? Fifty-fifty.
Don't try to move, don't do
anything, stay right there.

There is a familiar sound behind them, a furious WHIRRING and

That UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECT continually navigating the tunnels of Gateway rounds the corner -- and heads RIGHT FOR BOB, a metal ball with bug arms, flying closer and closer and

DANE (CONT'D)

On second thought run away!

Bob turns and runs the other way down the corridor, lumbering like a medieval knight, with the metal ball in CLOSE PURSUIT.

A stunned Dane watches him go.

Bob looks back over his shoulder, trying to pump his heavy legs. He's not fast enough. It reaches him and ATTACHES TO BOB like an alien jet-pack and

He is lifted off his feet. BOB FLIES THROUGH THE TUNNEL out of control, faster and faster.

BOB'S P.O.V. He turns a corner, and another, winding his way deeper into the asteroid until he runs out of space. Bob speeds toward the DEAD END and

INT. SPHERICAL CHAMBER -- DAY

The wall opens up and BOB FLIES into the hidden spherical chamber discovered earlier, walls perfectly round and smooth.

PROFESSOR HEGRAMET is inside the room, with a SMALL TOOL in his hand, examining the interior. He looks up, dumbfounded--

Bob flies into the middle of the chamber, suspended in the exact center of the sphere. Immediately the armor ACTIVATES:

The walls of the sphere fill with STARS, CONSTELLATIONS and GALAXIES, PLANETS and MOONS, SUNS and NEBULA. Bob looks like he's floating in outer space with the greatest mysteries of the universe all around him...

His armor is full of stars too, an alien imaging system, and as Bob struggles and fights the pictures on the walls CHANGE.

Professor Hegramet can't believe it. He looks around, all around, as the wonders of the cosmos dance across the sphere:

PROFESSOR
It's a map. A map!

Bob floats in the center of the chamber, getting the hang of it now, no longer scared. He begins to manipulate his body more judiciously, moving his arms and legs in gentle arcs, spinning slowly, beautifully--

DANE forces open the door. Looks in. Sees what's happening.

Bob watches the stars shift and change, each stunning vista replaced by an equally exotic view, alien, breathtaking ...and suddenly the map stops.

Bob stares at a specific STAR FORMATION frozen before him and
Abruptly the image disappears.

BOB FALLS to the ground, and when he hits, the ARMOR SHATTERS
into a hundred jagged pieces--

Professor Hegramet runs over. Dane scrambles down the slope.

By the time they reach Bob, he is lying flat on his back but
okay, LAUGHING like a maniac--

PROFESSOR

Help him...

They get on either side of Bob and lift him up onto his feet.
All three men share a look. Bob can't wipe the smile off his
face. It grows infectious. Soon all three are smiling wide.

PROFESSOR

Robert, you may have just
found the location of the
missing Heechee.

Dane grows a sneaky look and starts to back away. Bob grabs
his shirt and pulls him close:

BOB

You're not goin' anywhere
unless I say it's okay--
We're *partners*, remember?

They look up as SHIKY tentatively flies into the chamber. He
is holding Bob's broken BROOM.

SHIKY

Bob, your broom has been
vandalized. Are you okay?
What's going on?

Bob throws a glance at the Professor, who nods yes, tell him.

BOB

Forget the brooms, Shiky --
we're going.

SHIKY

Going where?

Bob thinks about it some more and can't help but LAUGH again.

BOB

To the stars. To the stars!

INT. SMALL BOOTH -- DAY

A SCRATCHY MISSION REPORT plays on a dirty screen. The CREW MEMBER in front of the camera is tired, barely able to speak:

CREWMAN

We dropped out of warp into a transpolar orbit. Planet had three detectable satellites-- Six other planets inferred by computer logic...

As he speaks the central image is surrounded by PICTURES OF THE PLANET they found -- plus shots of the SURROUNDING STARS.

CREWMAN (CONT'D)

Scans located a Heechee space station in orbit. Attempt to enter failed... Nina and Jim were killed in the explosion. Vessel damaged. No artifacts secured. Biotic samples from planet destroyed in damage to--

BOB sits inside a small dark booth watching the specific star formations. It looks like he's been doing this a long time.

BOB

(voice command)

Next.

A MISSION NUMBER flashes briefly. Now the face of a FEMALE CREW MEMBER appears. She's been crying, her tears dried now.

FEMALE CREWMAN

This is our 281st day. Sunnyi lost the first draw...and Axel volunteered 40 days later. I'm putting everything on full automatic and taking the pills. We all wrote letters. Please forward as addressed, if this goddamned ship ever gets back--

BOB

Next.

A MISSION NUMBER flashes briefly. Then the nervous face of a male CREW LEADER appears and:

CREW LEADER

Our radar can't penetrate the clouds of dust and vapor.

Pictures of the planet appear, and then a sequence of STAR FORMATIONS. Bob rubs his eyes hard and tries to concentrate.

CREW LEADER (CONT'D)

Otherwise we are "go" for a landing. I'm a little worried about the spots on the sun--

Even Bob is getting depressed.

BOB

Next.

CUT TO:

INT. SHIKY'S QUARTERS -- DAY

BOB steps inside and the door closes behind him. This room is considerably larger than Bob's closet, but still cramped for three people. PROFESSOR HEGRAMET sits at a table behind a STACK OF BOOKS, scanning the pages of another thick volume.

SHIKY flutters across the room with his own book. His wings flap slower and his body lowers until the collar of his shirt CATCHES ON A HOOK. He hangs--

SHIKY

(hopeful)

Any luck, Bob?

Bob just shakes his head. No.

PROFESSOR

Patience, my boy-- The stars do not hide from us... They twinkle in the sky for all to see, if you know where to look.

BOB

Maybe what we're looking for doesn't exist anymore. Things change in a million years...

PROFESSOR

If the Heechee wanted to leave a map for the next intelligent species that would follow them into space, surely they would compensate for galactic drift--

The door slides open again. This time DANE stumbles inside, like he's run a long distance.

DANE
Something's happening!

INT. COMMUNITY HALL -- DAY

Several dozen PROSPECTORS partly fill a large room that could hold a great deal more. None of them look particularly happy to be here. A grizzled FLIGHT DIRECTOR stands at the head of the assembly, ready to get started, when he sees more enter--

BOB, SHIKY, PROFESSOR HEGRAMET, and DANE slip into the room, like kids late for math class.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR
Okay. Grab a seat. Let's get started. Most of you are here by invitation...
(looking their way)
...with one or two exceptions.

Bob and the others take seats.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR
You all know our distinguished friend, Bob Broadhead. If you don't, he's the guy who opened a drive box, and spent two months in warp going nowhere--

A number of people CLAP and CHEER with derision. Bob waves halfheartedly at his faux fans.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
What none of you know is that the colors on his control panel were not the regular course settings for Gateway; and when the computer compared them, it came up with a whole new concept of Heechee navigation.

Everyone immediately quiets, trying to catch up. Did we just hear what we think we heard...?

FLIGHT DIRECTOR
For the first time, we believe we can pick a destination, set course, and go there.

The prospectors MUTTER to one another. Bob, Shiky, Professor Hegramet and Dane share a look.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR

This mission is simple. We're sending out a dozen ships to a dozen different coordinates to see who gets where they're supposed to be going... if anyone. Every crew member on any ship that successfully reaches its target destination will receive a twenty thousand dollar bonus.

The flight director hits a REMOTE. A far GALAXY appears on the screen directly behind him.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Andromeda, anyone?

A smattering of hands goes up. Not as many as you'd think. The Flight Director scans the crowd and quickly chooses one--

FLIGHT DIRECTOR

Thanks, Joe, you and your crew.

He makes a note of it on his CLIPBOARD, and hits the remote. A close-up of a STAR appears--

FLIGHT DIRECTOR

Xi Pegasi A.

More hands go up. The Flight Director locks eyes on one. In the crowd we see Bob and Professor Hegramet whispering to one another. Shiky and Dane as well. None of them are paying attention to the next picture:

IT IS THE STAR FORMATION they saw on the wall of that sphere.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR

All right, next up is...

Bob casually glances, sees the screen, and bolts to his feet:

BOB

(yelling)
I'll take it!

Everyone turns around and looks. The Professor reaches out to Bob, but stops himself, not wanting to give anything away.

PROFESSOR

Easy, Robert.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR

Do you have a crew, Broadhead?

BOB
You're lookin' at 'em.

Professor Hegramet, Shiky, and Dane straighten up, and try to look their best. Doesn't quite work for the Flight Director.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR
Uh-huh.
(short pause)
I don't think so.

BOB
Why not?

FLIGHT DIRECTOR
Lots of reasons. You want me to pick one?

BOB
Yeah--

FLIGHT DIRECTOR
You don't have an experienced pilot.

FEMALE VOICE
Oh hell, I'll fly the ship...

Everyone turns around to see KLARA leaning against the door, like she's been here a while--

Bob smiles big, surprised to see her. She gives him a little back, just enough of a glance, keeping her focus on the flummoxed flight director, who doesn't really like surprises.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR
The lady can't stay away.
(fighting it)
All right. Bob Broadhead and his crew going to...

The Flight Director seems uncertain. Finally he just turns around and looks at the screen.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
What is that-- Who the hell picked this one?

He checks his clipboard. Nods.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR
...Zeta Tauri.

CUT TO:

White letters and numbers PRINT quickly across a dark screen.

MISSION 36-107

*Vessel 545, Voyage 020T141, Crew R. Broadhead, K. Moynlin,
A. Hegramet, S. Bakin, D. Mechnikov*

CUT TO:

INT. HEECHEE SHIP -- SPACE

BOB, KLARA, PROFESSOR HEGRAMET, SHIKY, and DANE fill the alien cabin with LAUGHTER, tossing one another CANS OF BEER--

BOB (V.O.)

This is Bob Broadhead's log. I don't think any of us have ever been happier. The case of beer we snuck on board in the arms and legs of our spacesuits went fast, but the crew has been riding a buzz since lift-off.

CUT TO:

SHIKY flies through the cabin performing a variety of routine ship tasks. He moves effortlessly and with surprising grace.

BOB (V.O.)

Good ol' Shiky, who seemed so ridiculous back on Gateway, has found a dignity in space the rest of us can never hope to match. When we drop out of warp and hit the zero-g, his wings come off, and then we'll really see what he can do....

CUT TO:

THE PROFESSOR looks years younger as he works a tiny SCANNER.

BOB (V.O.)

The Professor is living the adventure he's spent his life reading and writing about--

He likes his work and GIGGLES.

BOB (V.O.)

He giggles like a school girl, but won't admit it.

BOB casually walks past. Immediately, the Professor bellows:

PROFESSOR
That was NOT a giggle!

CUT TO:

DANE sits in the lander staring out the porthole at the dark starless warp space outside. He writes with PEN AND PAPER. BOB sneaks up behind him and

BOB (V.O.)
I found Dane writing poetry--
His words are descriptive...
maybe even beautiful. When he
asks me I tell him they stink.

Now we see Bob coming back to peek at them again. And again.

BOB (V.O.)
But he catches me coming back
for more, and knows I'm lyin'.

CUT TO:

In the lander BOB and KLARA lie wrapped in each other's arms.

BOB (V.O.)
Klara never made it to Earth.
She hopped off at a refueling
station, and hitched back to
Gateway on a cargo freighter.

KLARA
Thanks, Broadhead.

BOB
For what?

KLARA
I had a lot of things, but
never a crazy dream before...
What's the point? If you
don't have anyone to share
it with.

She sounds almost surprised. Bob doesn't say anything, just holds her close, and soon enough they're both soundly asleep.

BOB (V.O.)
We fall asleep, and in my
dream, none of this seems
crazy at all.

CUT TO:

INT. HEECHEE SHIP -- DREAM

BOB wakes up and looks around. The ship is empty. He walks slowly toward that porthole--

BOB (V.O.)

I wake up and find the ship empty. But I know when I look out the window I'll see exactly what I'm supposed to see, what every step has brought me closer to seeing, and when I do, there won't be any doubt left that all of this has meant something --us, the Heechee, Gateway-- and the universe will never feel cold or lonely again.

Bob touches his hand to the glass. THE LIGHT is blinding and

KLARA'S VOICE

Bob? Bob. Bob!

CUT TO:

INT. HEECHEE SHIP -- SPACE

BOB wakes up. KLARA feels something. Now he senses it too--

BOB

We're stopping.

The zero-g kicks in. Bob and Klara FLOAT UP off the floor and smile at each other, pushing themselves toward the hatch. They enter the main cabin and

SHIKY is taking off his wings, flying without them for the first time. He glides toward Bob and embraces him, ecstatic.

SHIKY

Look at me, Bob. No wings!

PROFESSOR HEGRAMET hangs onto the bulkhead, like it's finally sinking in. Bob goes to him.

PROFESSOR

I think we made it--

BOB

C'mon, professor, let's go take a look, huh?

He just nods back, and follows Bob. DANE is at the controls:

DANE
Starting spherical scan...
rotating ship now--

Bob and the others gather around the window. Not much to see just yet. It looks UNFOCUSED.

BOB
The stars are blurry.

KLARA
(not liking that)
Turn on the radio.

DANE
Why?

KLARA
Just turn it on--

Dane hits a SWITCH. The cabin fills with EAR-PIERCING NOISE. Suddenly the ship ROCKS wildly. Everybody fights to hold on:

SHIKY
Gravity wave!

Bob sees something out the porthole and pushes himself back away from the glass, covering his eyes, like it hurts to see. He floats through the cabin...

BOB (V.O.)
I saw something that was not
a star, and not a galaxy...
It hurt the eyes, but wasn't
bright. The hurt was far up
the optic track... The pain
was in the brain itself.

No one else can stay at the window either. But Dane sees it on the screen, and can't turn away. Transfixed with terror--

DANE
You killed us, Broadhead...
you killed us.

The Professor crosses himself.

PROFESSOR
This isn't Zeta Tauri.
(short pause)
Dearest god, we've had it--

EXT. A BLACK HOLE -- SPACE

The HEECHEE SHIP tumbles inexorably toward the BLACK HOLE sucking in everything around it, a dimly-glowing mass of pale blue light, mottled, immense, and terrifying. We pull back until their frail ship is nothing but an INSIGNIFICANT SPECK.

PROFESSOR (V.O.)

That thing is a black hole!

INT. HEECHEE SHIP -- SPACE

BOB, KLARA, PROFESSOR HEGRAMET, SHIKY, and DANE contemplate their fast-approaching death--

SHIKY

It will suck us in?

PROFESSOR

Not even light can escape its gravitational pull.

KLARA

How long?

PROFESSOR

Once we cross the blue event horizon, escape to the outside will be impossible.

KLARA

Take a guess.

PROFESSOR

Five minutes?

SHIKY

We need to fire the rockets--

DANE

Forget it. It would take two ships, probably more.

Bob has been floating in the cabin listening to all this, or not listening, it's difficult to say. Suddenly he speaks up:

BOB

We have two ships...

Everyone looks at him. Pause.

KLARA

We power the lander, back it up against the hull, strap it in place and blow everything we've got.... It plummets toward the hole, and we sail free in the command module--

DANE

You left out the part where we're splattered into jelly.

PROFESSOR

I believe that omission was intentional.

SHIKY

Friends, I think we can kill ourselves easily enough, but can we do it in five minutes?

CUT TO:

INT. SHIP'S AIRLOCK -- SPACE

BOB raises the bubble of his SPACESUIT and sets it in place. PROFESSOR HEGRAMET, wearing his own suit, secures the seals-- They share a grim look through their visors and just BREATHE.

CUT TO:

INT. LANDING MODULE -- SPACE

KLARA floats inside the module, spins, and quickly positions herself in front of the controls. She flips the SWITCHES all around her in rapid succession, and the lander COMES TO LIFE.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND MODULE -- SPACE

DANE nervously slips on a HEADSET, and positions the mike. He glances at the ship's clock:

DANE

Four minutes--

CUT TO:

INT. LANDING MODULE -- SPACE

KLARA hits a final toggle. There is a DOOM somewhere deep in

the ship, and the lander FLOATS FREE. She wraps her hands around the alien control stick.

CUT TO:

EXT. HEECHEE SHIP -- SPACE

The jets abruptly FIRE. The LANDER moves away from the ship.

CUT TO:

INT. WORKER'S SHAFT -- SPACE

SHIKY maneuvers through a claustrophobic maze of PIPES AND SWITCHES, gliding over, under, and all around, flipping toggles and changing settings--

CUT TO:

EXT. HEECHEE SHIP -- SPACE

BOB opens the exterior HATCH and pulls himself half-way out of the ship, stopping to stare:

BOB'S P.O.V. The BLACK HOLE blocks out even the stars, consuming the universe like an immense horrible gaping mouth.

Bob pulls his legs free. PROFESSOR HEGRAMET sticks his head through the hatch, and just like Bob did, reacts to the view.

THE LANDER rises up above the artificial horizon created by the vessel, maneuvering JETS FIRE, and it gracefully ROTATES.

Bob grabs for a handhold and begins to crawl across the hull.

CUT TO:

INT. LANDING MODULE -- SPACE

KLARA works the control stick, backing up the lander. The two halves of the ship BUMP and

DANE'S VOICE

Three minutes--

CUT TO:

EXT. HEECHEE SHIP -- SPACE

BOB and PROFESSOR HEGRAMET attach a MOUNTING STRAP designed to hold the lander in position.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND MODULE -- SPACE

DANE shoves loose EQUIPMENT into the storage BINS. The ship rocks wildly from another GRAVITY WAVE and he holds on tight.

CUT TO:

EXT. HEECHEE SHIP -- SPACE

The ship rolls and BOB SLIDES ACROSS THE HULL, looking for a hand-hold. He starts to slip off as his fingers find a grip.

Bob holds onto the ship with his legs hanging over the side--

He pulls himself back onto the hull, and looks for PROFESSOR HEGRAMET. The old man is all right but too exhausted to go on. He gestures weakly. Bob nods and starts crawling again.

CUT TO:

INT. LANDING MODULE -- SPACE

KLARA fights the alien controls, trying to steady the lander.

CUT TO:

EXT. HEECHEE SHIP -- SPACE

BOB struggles to snap the LAST STRAP into place, his face a mix of anger and determination. He forces the strap down and

DANE'S VOICE

Two minutes--

CUT TO:

INT. LANDING MODULE -- SPACE

KLARA hurries to unlock the HATCH. Finally, the seal gives way. SHIKY floats into the lander. They quickly go to work.

CUT TO:

EXT. HEECHEE SHIP -- SPACE

The HEECHEE SHIP plunges closer and closer to the BLACK HOLE.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND MODULE -- SPACE

DANE moves back to the main control panel. Checks the clock.

DANE
One minute thirty seconds--

CUT TO:

INT. LANDING MODULE -- SPACE

SHIKY flips a last switch. He shares an ominous look with KLARA, and sails out the hatch.

A moment later BOB sticks his head inside the lander. He's still wearing his spacesuit, and so they have to talk loudly:

BOB
Time to go.

KLARA
I have to finish wiring
for the remote ignition.

BOB
I'll do it.

Klara pushes off the bulkhead and floats to Bob. Before he can speak again, she bends close and kisses his space helmet. The kiss leaves an IMPRINT OF HER LIPS on his helmet bubble--

KLARA
You can't in that suit--
Get up top, and be ready
to light this candle...
I'll be right behind you.

DANE'S VOICE
One minute--

Bob doesn't like going, but there's no time. He gives her a confident smile and pushes off.

Klara watches him go for a second and then gets back to work.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND MODULE -- SPACE

BOB pulls himself up the ladder. Enters the command module--

PROFESSOR HEGRAMET struggles with a makeshift ROPE, strapping himself to a bulkhead. SHIKY has already slipped into his own LEGLESS SPACESUIT and is doing the same. DANE pushes off toward his SUIT, just starting to get in when Bob approaches.

BOB
Klara's right behind me...

Dane looks at him. Like he knows something Bob doesn't know.

DANE
Thirty seconds--

BOB
Where's the remote trigger?

Bob helps the Professor tie himself to the bulkhead. Dane wishes Bob would just go away. Against his better judgement:

DANE
There wasn't time to rig a remote, Broadhead.

Bob looks into Dane's eyes, and suddenly, he knows the truth.

He turns and lunges for the ladder, clumsy in his spacesuit. We hear the others yell "BOB!" He takes the rungs too fast, but doesn't care, slipping and crashing hard into the floor--

BOB'S P.O.V. Through the bubble of his space helmet, Bob sees KLARA still inside the lander SWINGING THE HATCH CLOSED.

BOB
KLARA!

Bob pushes off toward the hatch, floating too slow. We hear his tortured BREATHING inside the suit, and Dane's countdown:

DANE'S VOICE
Ten seconds...nine...eight...

Bob reaches the hatch and grabs at the lever with his clumsy gloves. Can't get a firm grip. When he does, it won't turn.

DANE'S VOICE
...seven...six...five... Oh, to hell with it.

Bob makes a fist and POUNDS on the hatch, AGAIN and AGAIN and

Back on the upper level, Dane stops counting and holds on, trying not to sound terrified:

DANE
If I die, drinks are on me!

Bob is thrown hard against the bulkhead. He opens his mouth to scream in protest, and doesn't stop, but no one hears him over the ROAR OF THE ROCKETS--

CUT TO:

EXT. HEECHEE SHIP -- SPACE

The Heechee ship BLASTS APART. The LANDER plummets wildly toward the BLACK HOLE while the COMMAND MODULE rockets away--

CUT TO:

INT. LANDING MODULE -- SPACE

KLARA holds onto the control stick, strapped into position, fighting the gravitational forces. She begins to SCREAM and

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BLACK HOLE -- SPACE

The LANDER crosses the EVENT HORIZON -- and is suddenly GONE.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND MODULE -- SPACE

BOB fights to stay conscious, but the acceleration is too much. He passes out, and mercifully, the screen goes BLACK.

INT. COMMAND MODULE -- LATER

BOB opens his eyes. Groggy--

BOB'S P.O.V. The ship looks very different, darker, possibly damaged. Juts a few red EMERGENCY LIGHTS. The whole thing seems to be spinning oddly, or maybe Bob is spinning. The imprint of Klara's LIPS is still visible on the clear bubble.

Bob floats free inside of the ship. He reaches out, grabs for the nearest metal rung, and pulls his body up the ladder.

Bob forces an emergency HATCH and rises into the cabin. SEES PERFECT SPHERICAL DROPS OF BLOOD floating through the air and

He follows the trail to DANE, drifting as far as the ROPE around him allows, hull SHRAPNEL sticking out of his suit....

Bob hears a GROAN over his radio and pushes across the cabin.

SHIKY is still strapped to a bulkhead, very weak. But alive:

SHIKY

Bob... I am happy to see you.
Dane is dead. The professor
was blown outside...

Bob gently nods to Shiky. He turns around. There is a makeshift rope tied to the interior acting as a TETHER LINE--

Bob's eyes follow the rope across the cabin, through a JAGGED HOLE in the side of the hull, and all the way out into space.

EXT. HEECHEE SHIP -- SPACE

BOB pulls himself across open space along the TETHER LINE stretching from the hole in the ship to the fragile body of PROFESSOR HEGRAMET, spinning slowly at the end of the rope...

Bob reaches the body. What he sees takes Bob by surprise. The Professor is smiling wide:

PROFESSOR
(with difficulty)
Thank you, Bob. Thank you.

BOB
For what?

PROFESSOR
For making my last day the
greatest...

His face slackens and, just like that, the old man is DEAD. Bob can't believe he's gone...

Then his eyes move slowly down the length of the Professor's arm, from his shoulder to his elbow, continuing on to that thick, clumsy spacesuit glove.

Professor Hegramet died POINTING HIS FINGER at something and

Bob turns his head, peeking out the side of his helmet, like he's in awe. We notice the REFLECTION in the Professor's helmet visor. Something big--

ANOTHER HEECHEE SHIP blocks out the stars directly above Bob. It is similar to the ships we've come to know, but much larger -- and looks BRAND NEW.

Even more astounding is the actual HEECHEE floating in space.

Bob immediately begins to breathe faster. That's all we hear as he drifts closer and closer to the Heechee, just his increasingly rapid BREATHING--

The Heechee is wearing a SPACESUIT of its own, so we can't see the alien body; but it has TWO LEGS, bending outward like

an insect. There are TWO ARMS high on the torso, which is more elongated than ours, and MORE ARMS lower, though these may simply be mechanical and part of the suit. The gloves are made for way TOO MANY FINGERS than we'll ever be used to.

The space helmet is not so different really, and hides most of the head and face. But there is no mistaking the alien nature of the EYES watching Bob, eyes that he's seen before--

The Heechee does nothing. Just floats there, very patiently.

Bob stares through his helmet visor. It is beginning to FOG from his hyperventilating and

Then he seems to have an idea.

Bob reaches one of his gloved hands into a large POCKET on the side of his spacesuit. It takes a second, but finally he finds what he's searching for.

Bob holds up that weird HEECHEE SCREWDRIVER -- and throws it.

The screwdriver tumbles slowly across the short distance between them. For a moment, it seems as if the alien is not going to react. Doesn't care.

At the last second the Heechee extends its hand. Catches it.

MALE VOICE

Mr. Broadhead, what compelled you to toss the so-called "screwdriver" to the Heechee?

BOB (V.O.)

I don't know.

MALE VOICE

Did you believe the alien in front of you was the actual Heechee to which this object originally belonged?

Bob and the Heechee look at one another in the void of space.

MALE VOICE

Perhaps you interpreted your experiences as some form of elaborate "test" -- one that would successfully conclude only by returning the object?

BOB (V.O.)

I already said, I don't know.

CLOSE-UP of BOB watching the Heechee. From the REFLECTION in his visor, we can see the alien is making elaborate arm and hand movements. SOME KIND OF SIGN LANGUAGE. Bob reaches up and touches a tiny CAMERA mounted on the side of his helmet--

MALE VOICE

I see. And that's when the alien began gesturing at you.

INT. DEBRIEFING ROOM -- DAY

BOB finds himself in the same debriefing room, sitting at the same table...but this time facing the NEW ASSISTANT DIRECTOR.

NEW A.D.

What we can see on the tape before your camera gave out suggests the movements were intended as a method of communication; but you have no specific recollection of any gestures the alien used?

Bob just shakes his head. He really doesn't want to be here.

NEW A.D.

That *is* unfortunate. Still, one can expect no more under the circumstances. And it doesn't detract an iota from your great achievement, and contribution to the future--

The Assistant Director slides over an official-looking PAPER:

NEW A.D.

This is your copy of a memo authorizing payment of five hundred million dollars to you, and another payment of same to your fellow crewman, Shikitei Bakin.

He really seems happy for Bob.

NEW A.D. (CONT'D)

I hear that they're planning an old-fashioned ticker-tape parade for you two back home --just like they did for the first man on the moon!

BOB

When can I ship out again?

The New Assistant Director nods his head too long, like he doesn't know how to respond:

NEW A.D.

Bob... May I call you Bob?
You're a hero now. There
are so many meaningful ways
you can contribute to the
program, public appearances,
speaking engagements--

BOB

So I'm grounded.

The Assistant Director reaches over. Turns off the RECORDER.

NEW A.D.

She is not *dead*, you know...
Bob, when your ship returned
to Gateway, you were almost a
year overdue. We had written
you off. That's because you
were near the event horizon--
you do understand about time
dilation inside a black hole,
don't you? What seemed like
only fifteen minutes to you
and your crew was to the rest
of us over three hundred and
fifty days... Any closer to
the hole and fifteen minutes
would have turned out to be a
decade, or a century -- and
that is what's happening to
Klara Moynlin right now. You
did not cause her death. She
is still alive, still falling
toward the black hole -- and
she always will be. You see?

Bob just stares at him until:

BOB

Is that supposed to make me
feel better...

And he checks the NAMEPLATE--

BOB (CONT'D)

...Mr. Sebastian?

NEW A.D.
I'm just trying to--

BOB
For the rest of my life the woman I love will be stuck in amber. I'll grow old and try to forget... and Klara will be up there, terrified, alone, falling toward that hole until the end of time?

The New Assistant Director tries to say something again, but Bob keeps going, with increasing intensity. He frightens us:

BOB (CONT'D)
I killed her and I'm still killing her. For the rest of my life, I'll be killing her. Do you have anything else you want to say to me, you stupid little man?!

INT. GATEWAY CORRIDOR -- DAY

The door opens and a SECURITY GUARD peeks out. BOB waits in the shadows wearing a HOODED PONCHO to help conceal his face.

Down the hall a CROWD has gathered around SHIKY, who hovers slightly above them, WINGS flapping as he signs an AUTOGRAPH.

A REPORTER thrusts her mike:

REPORTER
With all that money, are you going to buy yourself a pair of prosthetic legs?

Shiky hands the slip of paper to the owner and signs ANOTHER.

SHIKY
Then I would not be a beautiful butterfly!

As the crowd LAUGHS and yells MORE QUESTIONS, the security guard leads Bob the other way. Still they don't make it far before a WOMAN turns around, sees them, and quickly realizes:

WOMAN
THERE HE IS--

INT. GATEWAY ELEVATOR -- DAY

BOB and the SECURITY GUARD run into an elevator. They watch the CROWD RUSH TOWARD THEM, waving their arms and SHOUTING, until the doors slide shut and

BOB

What now?

GUARD

My orders are to escort you to the Earth shuttle, and to prevent you from approaching a Heechee vessel.

Bob nods his head. He understands. But something is on his mind. He turns to the guard and offers him a friendly smile.

INT. MACKLEN MEMORIAL -- DAY

BOB stands on a familiar stone floor COVERED IN PLEXIGLASS to protect the fatalistic message roughly scratched in the rock, "SYLVESTER MACKLEN WAS HERE"--

Bob reads the words on the floor. He seems thoughtful. The SECURITY GUARD hangs back, and just lets him have his moment.

VOICE OF GATEWAY

*Gateway was discovered by
Sylvester Macklen, a tunnel
rat on Venus, who found an
operable Heechee spacecraft
in a dig, and got inside--*

The automated presentation continues in the background, as it did before, while Bob makes a slow circle around the chamber:

BOB

Just wanted to see it one more time before I left for good. Thank you, Charlie.

GUARD

(more relaxed)

I bet there's going to be a museum like this dedicated to you soon, Mr. Broadhead. First contact with an alien race. It's quite exciting--

Bob steps up to a part of the memorial that is roped off from

the rest. Looks at the object on the other side of the line. The security guard is lost in his own musings now. Asks Bob:

GUARD

I wonder... do the Heechee think like we do? Do they love like we do? What are your thoughts, sir?

He starts to turn back around, and BOB HITS HIM WITH ONE OF THE POLES used to rope off the display. The guard goes down.

BOB

Sorry, Charlie....

Bob drops the pole and walks over the fallen rope toward that dusty and unused HEECHEE SHIP.

VOICE OF GATEWAY

The Heechee vessel you see here is the actual ship Macklen used to travel to Gateway!

Bob goes to the old hatch. Won't budge. Finally it gives way and he begins to climb in.

VOICE OF GATEWAY

No longer functional, here it sits, a monument to--

Bob SLAMS the hatch closed and

INT. HEECHEE SHIP -- DAY

BOB stands directly in front of the HEECHEE CONTROL PANEL. By now its appearance is familiar, and yet it remains as mysterious and unknowable as always: WHEELS and SPOKES, SPIRAL COLUMNS, LIGHTS and SWITCHES, a nearly dizzying array.

He doesn't approach the panel right away, as if giving the thing the respect it deserves.

Then Bob steps forward, raises his arms, and methodically begins working the controls...

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE -- FLASHBACK

BOB floats inside his SPACESUIT. Watches the alien HEECHEE--

CUT TO:

INT. HEECHEE SHIP -- DAY

BOB stands in front of the controls making elaborate arm and hand movements. Each gesture results in the TURN OF A WHEEL or the SETTING OF A SPOKE, the FLIP OF A SWITCH and the activation of another LIGHT. He never stops and never hesitates, executing an incredibly choreographed routine, one that no human being can know--

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE -- FLASHBACK

The alien HEECHEE hangs in space, its inhuman eyes staring at us. The creature MOVES ITS ARMS, working a control panel that isn't there, teaching Bob what to do: what wheel to turn, what spoke to set, what switch to trigger, and when....

CUT TO:

INT. HEECHEE SHIP -- DAY

BOB works with increasing confidence. Faster. Still faster. We continue to CUT BETWEEN BOB AND THE HEECHEE, a human hand turning alien then back again, the Heechee beginning a gesture and Bob completing it...and the CONTROL PANEL COMES ALIVE like never before. This is a Heechee ship the way it was meant to be -- everything HUMMING, BUZZING, and WHIRRING!

INT. THE MEMORIAL -- DAY

The SECURITY GUARD slowly comes around. He looks. Sees the HEECHEE SHIP RISING UP off the floor, as if by an invisible hand, disappearing through a rocky OPENING in the ceiling and

EXT. THE ASTEROID -- DAY

The HEECHEE SHIP rises to the surface of Gateway and assumes its launch position inside one of the endless hollow CRATERS.

INT. HEECHEE SHIP -- DAY

BOB makes the last adjustment and stands in front of the gleaming control panel, *his arms still in the air*, like a conductor who's just completed the performance of his career.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLACK HOLE -- SPACE

Klara's LANDER crosses the BLUE EVENT HORIZON, as before, and

INT. THE LANDER -- SPACE

KLARA holds onto the control stick, COMPLETING THE SCREAM we saw her begin earlier. As soon as it's done, she feels a gentle BUMP. Like something just made contact with the ship?

Klara looks dumbfounded. Starts to check the read-outs when she hears a mundane everyday KNOCK. Someone is at the door--

She turns and looks at the hatch. Again there comes a KNOCK.

Klara can't believe this, but doesn't really know what else to do, so she unstraps herself and floats over to the hatch--

Klara unlocks the bolt, swings open the door, and BOB glides into the lander with a big smile, wrapping his arms around her as they drift in the ship:

KLARA

Bob. You had another one
of your ideas--

BOB

Uh-huh.

KLARA

How did you find me?

BOB

With a little help from a
Heechee.

KLARA

We're inside a black hole!

BOB

I know.

They continue to tumble through the cabin. Bob moves in for a kiss...but Klara pulls back.

KLARA

Don't you get it? Every
second we spend inside of
the hole...

BOB

...decades and centuries
are passing by outside--
(short pause)
Will you please kiss me?

Klara looks at him, and when they finally do, it's well worth the wait. The kiss goes on for several seconds, seems like it might end, but then continues for quite a good bit longer.

Eventually they pull apart, but not by much, floating in each other's arms, perfectly happy:

KLARA

You have no clue how to
get us out of here...do
you?

BOB

None at all.

Bob and Klara kiss again. We drift away from the two lovers and leave them to their efforts, sailing out THROUGH THE SMALL PORTHOLE, until we're outside the spaceship looking in.

KLARA

Who knew you were such a
romantic fool, Broadhead?

BOB

Sailing into nothingness
with you 'til the end of
time is a good way to go.

EXT. THE BLACK HOLE -- SPACE

We slowly pull back from the porthole of their HEECHEE SHIP--

BOB

And who knows? Maybe
we'll run into somebody
heading the other way.

There's something about the way Bob says that. Klara looks at him, newfound wonder beginning to spread over her face and

Bob and Klara push off toward the small porthole, and just as they have done countless times before, look out the window...

This black hole isn't really black-- And not much of a hole.

The space around them is JAM-PACKED WITH PLANETS. No human being has never laid eyes on such beautiful worlds, *and never so close together.* We see large ringed giants and smaller globes of astounding color. This place is filled with STARS.

And MOONS. And COMETS. NEBULA too. It's an impossible collage of awe-inspiring vistas; and if there is a universe-maker, then this must certainly be where he stores the parts.

HUNDREDS OF HEECHEE STARSHIPS fill the space between worlds, heading in every direction....

FADE OUT.